

**THE CHURCH OF ETHIOPIA**

**A PANORAMA OF HISTORY**

**AND**

**SPIRITUAL LIFE**

***First Printing 1970***

**Second Printing 1997**

## Message of His Holiness the Patriarch

As written in the Holy Scriptures it is well known that the Faith of the Gospel is likened to a grain of mustard seed (Mat. 13:31-32)

This tiny seed grows to become a big tree which provides a shade to birds through the unstinting efforts of the farmer. Likewise, the Faith of the Gospel was sown in the minds of a few members of the family of Christ and has today become a world religion through the unremitting efforts of the farmers of the Gospel who have risen since the time of the Apostles.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church which inherited the Holy Apostolic Tradition has been preaching the word of the Gospel since the time of the Apostles. It is precisely because of this that the Faith of the Gospel has become a tree of life under whom multitude of believers are sheltered in this African land. It is on account of this phenomenon that the Christian world views this church with great respect.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church is one of the churches that laid the basis for the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1948 and 1963 respectively.

This Church did host the first Meeting of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in 1965 which was the first Meeting since the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431; the Meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC in 1971 and the Executive Committee Meeting of the WCC in 1989. In this spirit, the Church strives for the strengthening of Ecumenism with the aim of restoring the ancient unity which prevailed among the churches. The Church now feels glad to host the 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC).

This book was first published in 1970 on the occasion of the holding of the Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia.

It is now published for the second time on the occasion of the 7th Assembly of the AACC which is being held in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia.

In the first edition of this book printed in 1970, it was stated that the number of parish churches were 14,500, bishops and dioceses 15 and the size of the clergy 200,000. But now the number of parish churches has grown to 30,000, clergy to 400,000, archbishops and archdioceses to 40 and the size of the laity at home and abroad to 40 million.

It is, therefore, possible to gauge the progress registered by our church in all spheres. We believe that all churches would share in our joy at this news of progress.

We pray that God shall restore to the churches the unity which prevailed prior to division.

Abba Paulos  
Patriarch of Ethiopia  
and Echegue of the See of St. Tekle Haimnot

*This book is dedicated  
to the memory of  
His Holiness  
Abuna Basilios  
Patriarch of Ethiopia  
1959 - 1970*



His Holiness, Abune Paulos Patriarch of Ethiopia  
and Echeque of the See of St. Tekle Haimanot



*His Holiness, the late Abuna Basilios,  
first Patriarch of Ethiopia, 1959 - 1970*



His Holiness, the late Abune Theophilos,  
Second Patriarch of Ethiopia 1970 - 1975



# THE CHURCH OF ETHIOPIA

## A PANORAMA OF HISTORY AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The purpose of this handbook is to give a brief and accurate introduction to the history, organization, doctrines, worship and institutions of the Ethiopian Church in the English language. The Editorial Committee consisted of Dr V.C. Samuel, Dean of the Theological College; Abba Gabra-Egziabher Degu, Head of the Department of Education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; Dr Taddesse Tamrat, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Haile Sellassie I University; Dr Sergew Hable Selassie, Associate Professor, Department of History, Haile Sellassie I University and Ato Adamu Amare, Administrative Secretary for the Urban and Industrial Mission, Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

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**SERGEW HABLE SELASSIE**

*Chairman of Publication Committee*

## FOREWORD

The Church of Ethiopia has been the repository of Ethiopian culture for the last 1600 years of her existence. The monasteries and churches have been not only places of ascetic and religious life but also prominent centres of learning. The Ethiopian monks and priests who taught in the courtyards of churches did so not in the expectation of material remuneration but in the hope of heavenly reward, because their educational philosophy was that knowledge was the means of salvation. Through it man can have closer contact with God; he is able to resist temptation in this world and triumph finally. Since a teacher served such high objectives he occupied an honoured position in society; he was often respected more than parents and each community considered it a duty to provide daily bread for the teacher.

Through the devotion of churchmen and the generosity of Ethiopian society, the Church of Ethiopia preserved the culture of the country. Today, we possess an enormous number of literary works of high religious, historical and philosophical value. Some Christian works of the early Church are extant only in the Ethiopic version. Liturgical works are numerous and hymns are rich in content and quality.

It is the object of this handbook to glance at the cultural heritage of the Church of Ethiopia. The history, literature, worship, faith and education of this Church have been discussed briefly by many scholars, both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian. These subjects are treated succinctly in this book, in the hope that it will serve as a brief introduction to a study of the Church of Ethiopia.

The handbook is being published in connection with the Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Addis Ababa in January 1971. We in Ethiopia consider the meeting a great event and welcome our honoured guests from all over the world to our country and our Church. As many of them may have only very little knowledge of the Church of this country, we feel it our duty to

bring out a book of this kind containing information on the Church and the many-sided aspects of its history and present activities. Although small in size, it will, we hope, fill a need and serve as a guide to the Ethiopian Church.

The title of the book, *The Church of Ethiopia*, is self-explanatory. It has been prepared by a committee appointed by the Central Office of the Church. The essays in it have been written by both members of the Committee and a few others outside its composition. It is hoped that all the information contained in the book is accurate and authentic.

We present *The Church of Ethiopia* with great joy to the public and particularly to the participants in the Central Committee Meeting of the World Council of Churches, and we pray that the grace and mercy of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit may go with you in all your undertakings. As we do so, we commit our Church to your continued prayer and unceasing concern.

ABUNA THEOPHILOS

Archbishop of Harrar and  
Acting Patriarch of Ethiopia

## PART ONE

### HISTORY

#### - I -

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ETHIOPIAN CHURCH

#### 1. PRE-CHRISTIAN TIMES

##### Traditional Sources

According to traditional sources, paganism as well as Judaism were practised side by side in Ethiopia before the introduction of Christianity. Both were the result of contact with Middle Eastern countries through commercial channels. It is believed that at an early stage of Ethiopian history, the worship of the Serpent was widespread and the Ethiopians offered sacrifices to it. This is confirmed to some extent by archaeological evidence found at Aksum: on one of the stelae at Aksum an engraving of a serpent is still visible today. Though the worship of the Serpent was spread through almost all the countries of the Middle East, we have reason to believe that this cult was introduced directly to Ethiopia from Persia. The description in *Avesta*, the sacred book of Persia, concerning the worship of the Serpent, is identical with the tradition found in Ethiopia.

##### Archaeological Sources

The Sabaeen migrants who crossed the Red Sea in the first millennium B.C. and settled in Ethiopia brought with them their own religion. They were polytheists, and worshipped different gods of heaven, the earth and the sea. Almouqah (Elmouqah), for example, was the principal god of the South Arabian pantheon, and was retained as such in Ethiopia. Other Sabaeen gods, like Astar (Astarte), corresponding to Aphrodite and Venus of the Greek and Roman world, Sin the

moon god and Shams the sun god, were widely worshipped in Ethiopia. Later, with the introduction of Greek culture into Ethiopia, worship of the Greek pantheon became widespread. In the well-known Greek inscription, left at Adulis by an anonymous Ethiopian Emperor, mention is made of Zeus, Poseidon and Ares. On the reverse of the monument appear engravings of another Greek god and demi-god, Hermes and Heracles. Ares, was in fact the personal god of the Ethiopian Emperors of the pre-Christian era, as shown in the frequent references made to him in epigraphic inscriptions.

After the third century, with the development of a more purely Ethiopian civilization, Ethiopic names evolved for the gods then worshipped. This can be observed in the pre-Christian Ge'ez inscriptions of Emperor Ezana, where Ethiopic names replace the Sabaeen or Greek names. Mahrem corresponds to Ares, Baher to Poseidon, and Semay to the Sabaeen god Almouqah.

Temples, altars and statues were dedicated to the gods. In Yeha there is a well-preserved temple dedicated to Almouqah. This temple was erected before the fifth century; it is rectangular in form, with a double wall and a single door. A similar temple to the same god existed at Hawlti-Melazo, near Aksum, but it is now in ruins. A temple dedicated to Ares is found in Aksum itself. Altars to the gods were also erected in various places. For example, at Kaskasse, about eight kilometres north-east of Matara, there is an altar with a Sabaeen dedicatory inscription to the god Sin, engraved with the symbols of the crescent and disc. There are also many altars bearing dedications in Sabaeen to Almouqah. After his victory over the Beja people on the northern frontier of his domain, the Emperor Ezana erected statues in gold, silver and bronze to the god Ares.

### **Monotheism**

Information about the introduction of Judaism into Ethiopia is found in the *Kebre Negest*, (*The Glory of the Kings*). The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon in Jerusalem is recounted there. On her return to Ethiopia she bore him a son, whom she named Menilek. When Menilek grew up he visited his father in Jerusalem, and came home accompanied by many Israelites, the sons of the Levites, and





*St. Frumentius, Abba Salama, Kassaté Berhan*

bringing with him the Ark of the Covenant, which he had obtained by subterfuge. From then on, Judaism was practised in Ethiopia. It is said by some authorities that the Falasha tribe of northern Ethiopia, who practise a form of Judaism to this day, are descendants of the Israelites. The form of Judaism professed is apparently a development of a pre-Talmudic type of worship.

## 2. THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

### St. Frumentius and the Conversion of Ezana c. 330 A.D.

Although Christianity became the official religion of the Aksumite kingdom in the fourth century, the religion had been known in Ethiopia since a much earlier time. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, VIII: 26-40, we are told of a certain Eunuch, the treasurer of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, who went to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. There he met Philip the Deacon and was baptized by him. Ethiopian tradition asserts that he returned home and evangelized the people. In his Homily on Pentecost, St. John Chrysostom mentions that the Ethiopians were present in the Holy City on the day of Pentecost. Later, when the Apostles went out to preach the Gospel, Matthew was allotted the task of carrying the good news to Ethiopia, where he suffered martyrdom. Ethiopian sources, such as the *Synaxarium*, make no mention of this, however; on the contrary, Ethiopians believe that they received Christianity without shedding Apostolic blood. Nevertheless, Christianity was certainly known in Ethiopia before the time of Frumentius, being the faith practised by many of the merchants from the Roman Empire settled in the Aksumite region. In important cities, such as Aksum and Adulis, these Christian merchants had their prayer houses and openly practised their religion.

The introduction of Christianity as the State religion of Ethiopia came about not as the result of organized evangelical activity from outside the country, but because it was the desire of the King. The story of the conversion of the Aksumites has come down to us in the work of the contemporary Church historian, Rufinus (d.410 A.D.). Meropius, a philosopher from Tyre, set out to visit India accompanied by two young relatives, Frumentius and Aedesius, Apparently they

followed the usual itinerary of the time along the African coast of the Red Sea. In the course of their journey they ran short of provisions and put in at a port on the African coast. The local inhabitants, however, were hostile to Roman citizens, as they had recently broken off their alliance with Rome. Consequently they massacred Meropius and all aboard the ship, sparing only the two boys, who were taken to the King. They soon gained his interest and won his confidence. The younger, Aedesius, he made his cup-bearer, while the elder, Frumentius, who showed signs of wisdom and maturity, became his treasurer and secretary. The King died early, leaving his wife with an infant son as heir to the throne. Now the dying King had given Frumentius and Aedesius leave to return to their own country if they so wished, but the Queen-Mother, who was left as Regent, begged them to remain to help her administer the kingdom until her son should grow up. The young men agreed, and stayed to carry out the task faithfully.

The thoughts of Frumentius then began to turn towards matters of faith. He sought out Christians among the Roman merchants settled at Aksum, and encouraged them to establish meeting-places for prayer, helping them in every way he could, according them favours and benefits, and gradually spreading the seed of Christianity among the people. The young King himself became a convert. When he was old enough to rule the country alone, Frumentius and Aedesius asked him for permission to leave Aksum. Aedesius returned home to Tyre, but Frumentius went to Alexandria and laid the whole affair before the newly-appointed Patriarch, Athanasius, begging him to appoint a bishop to minister to the needs of the growing Christian community at Aksum. The Patriarch summoned a council of priests to consider the matter. It was agreed that Frumentius himself should be consecrated as the first Bishop of Aksum. Thus he returned to propagate the faith in the land he knew so well. Although Rufinus does not specify the name of the country to which Frumentius went, other sources are more specific in this respect. A letter from the Emperor Constantius, written in 356 A.D. to his "precious brothers", Aezana and Saezana, rulers of Aksum, concerns the Bishop Frumentius. Furthermore, the inscriptions and coins of the Emperor Ezana testify to his adoption of Christianity. In his earlier inscriptions he styles himself "Son of unconquered Mah-regn", but in the inscription after his victory over Nubia he employed

a new terminology, speaking of "the Lord of heaven and earth", and describing how he had destroyed the "images in their temples", thus affirming his dissociation from paganism. A recently discovered Greek inscription belonging to Ezana leaves no doubt on this matter. It begins: "In the faith of God and the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost". Likewise, the coins minted in the early part of Ezana's reign bear the pagan symbol of the crescent and disc, while those minted in the later part of his reign bear the sign of the Cross.

The introduction of Christianity as the State religion marked a turning-point in Ethiopian history. Christianity does not constitute a purely religious phenomenon in the country, but plays an integral role in all aspects of national life. The Church is not only a religious institution, but has for many centuries been the repository of the cultural, political and social life of the people. The true feelings of the people who first received Christianity seem to have been expressed in the names they bestowed upon Frumentius, which are *Abba Salama*, *Kassaté Berhan*, "Father of Peace and Revealer of Light". It is interesting to note that Ezana and Saezana appear to have been baptized with names also signifying illumination - Abreha (He illuminated) and Atsbeha (He brought the dawn).

In Ethiopia, the diffusion of Christianity did not follow the same pattern as in the Graeco-Roman world, where Christianity was confined to the lower levels of society for three centuries, and utterly rejected by the ruling classes. Only at the beginning of the fourth century did it begin to gain a few converts among members of the imperial family. In Ethiopia the converse was true. Christianity was introduced first into the royal court, and from there gradually penetrated among the common people. Likewise, in the Roman Empire, the Apostles and later the Church Fathers were actively engaged in the evangelization of the people; in Ethiopia, Christianity was voluntarily adopted.

The birth of the Ethiopian Church took place at a time when the Arian heresy was at its peak. When Frumentius was consecrated, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, under the leadership of Athanasius, "the Column of Orthodoxy", was the stronghold of the Nicene Faith against Arianism. Constantius expelled Athanasius, however, and installed an Arian, George of Cappadocia, in his place. The first Ecumenical Council, where Arius was condemned as a heretic, took place in 325,

shortly before the establishment of the Ethiopian Church, but the decision of the Council was nevertheless regarded as binding, and Ethiopia stood by Athanasius, and the Nicene Faith. In vain, Constantius, the son of Constantine the Great, tried to bring Ethiopia into the heresy of Arius. It was for this reason that he addressed the letter to Aezana and Saezana, requesting them to send Frumentius to Alexandria to be examined in his faith. The aim was to deprive the orthodox group of any support, and ensure international recognition of Arianism. A certain Theophilus, a priest from Socotra, highly respected for his impeccable moral character, was entrusted with this mission to Aksum, but he was apparently not even allowed to enter Aksumite territory. His mission failed, and Frumentius remained in Aksum, to continue the teaching which he had learnt from Athanasius. The Ethiopian Church holds Athanasius in special veneration. He was canonized as a saint, and his work, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, was translated into Ethiopic. One of the fourteen Anaphoras of the Ethiopian Church is attributed to Athanasius. The 318 Fathers who participated in the First Ecumenical Council are also specially venerated, and another Anaphora of the Liturgy bears their name, as the Anaphora of the Three Hundred Fathers.

## - II -

### **THE EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION OF CHRISTIANITY c. 350 to 650 A.D.**

#### **Evangelistic Activities**

According to the chronological lists of the Ethiopian bishops, Frumentius was succeeded by the Bishop Minas. He was apparently of Egyptian origin. From this time onward began the peculiar Alexandrian jurisdiction over the Ethiopian Church, which was to last for sixteen hundred years. Throughout this period Ethiopians were not considered to be eligible for consecration as bishops.

Minas left certain literary works concerning his missionary activities, but the major contribution in the missionary field was that of the Nine Saints. They came to Aksum about 480, and were well-received by the Emperor Ella Amida and by the inhabitants of the city. The most outstanding figures among the Nine Saints were Za-Mikael Are-gawi, Pantaléwon, Afsé, and Garima or Isaac (Yeshaq). As their names indicate, they came from different parts of the Eastern Roman Empire, such as Constantinople and Syria. They were all adherents of the same doctrine, however. It seems that they left the countries of their origin because of religious differences; they were anti-Chalcedonians, and thus were persecuted by the Roman Emperor, who was an ardent supporter of the Chalcedonian doctrine. They went first to Egypt, and lived some years in the monastery founded by Pachomius, before proceeding to Ethiopia. In Aksum they studied the language and became familiar with the people and customs. After this preparation they set out in different directions to proselytize and to introduce monastic institutions. Only two of them, Abba Liqanos and Abba Pantaléwon, remained near Aksum itself, the others went further east of the capital and founded hermitages in the old pagan centres. Za-Mikael went to Debre Damo where the worship of the Serpent had long flourished. He succeeded in

eradicating the cult, and founded a monastery there. Abba Pantaléwon transformed a pagan temple into a church. Abba Afsé went to Yeha, the renowned Sabaeen centre, and likewise transformed the famous temple there into a church. The efforts of the Nine Saints to wipe out paganism did not result in their persecution, as had happened in the Roman Empire, since in Aksum they had the protection and support of the sovereign.

The Nine Saints also contributed greatly to the development of the Ge'ez liturgy and literature. They introduced new terms and vocabulary into Ge'ez, such as *haymanot*, religion, *qasis*, priest, and *ta'ot*, idols. But their major contribution was undoubtedly their great work of Biblical translation into Ge'ez. The work of translation had begun in part during the time of Frumentius. At that time only a few of the basic Books for worship, such as passages of the Psalms, had been translated, as revealed in contemporary inscriptions. The Nine Saints undertook the massive task of translating the whole Bible. Since they were familiar with both Syriac and Greek, they used a Syrio-Greek text for this purpose. Most probably each of the Nine Saints translated one portion of the Bible. This is why the Ethiopic version reveals considerable differences in style from one Book to another. The Ethiopic version is one of the earliest Bible translations, and as such it is of great importance in textual criticism and in establishing the original text.

The Nine Saints also translated a number of basic religious works into Ge'ez. These are of both doctrinal and literary content. Under the title of *Qerlos* (Cyril) were translated dogmatical treatises and homilies of the Church Fathers, in particular the work known as *De Recta Fide* by St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria. On this book, which was translated from the Greek text, is based the teaching of the Ethiopian Church. Other works translated at this period include *The Ascetic Rules* of Pachomius, which still today regulate the monastic life of Ethiopia, and the *Life of Saint Anthony* by St. Athanasius which is still widely read in Ethiopian Church circles.

## Music and Art

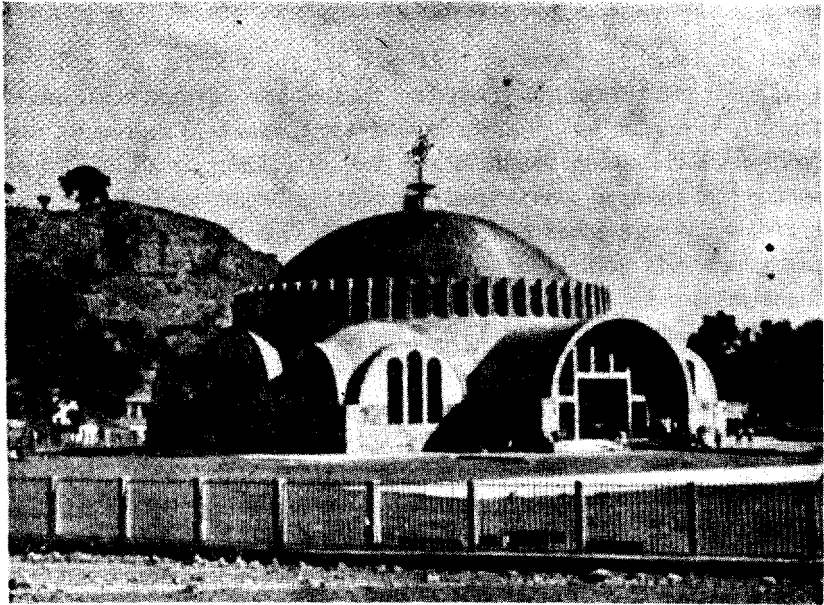
The coming of the Nine Saints inaugurated a new era in the liturgical life of the Ethiopian Church and in cultural development in general.

Music and art flourished. To Yared, an Aksumite scholar of the time, is attributed the creation of Ethiopian Church music. He was a disciple of the Nine Saints, probably of Aragawi, and composed music in three modes, which is still used in the Ethiopian Church. The hymnary attributed to him is rich in inspiration and expression; perhaps it is one of the best of its kind in the Orient. The influence of the Nine Saints extended also to art and architecture. The ruins of basilicas found in the ancient cities of Aksum, Adulis and Hawliti may show a resemblance to Syriac churches. The church of Aragawi at Debre Damo is the oldest existing example of Christian architecture in Ethiopia, and traces of this influence can be seen in it.

### Church Organization

After the expansion of Christianity there were at least four dioceses in Ethiopia, each headed by a bishop. The chief of these was obviously the Metropolitan of Aksum. The second most important diocese was Adulis; it was through this ancient port that Christianity was first introduced to Ethiopia. As we have already mentioned, all the bishops were of Egyptian origin. They were closely associated both dogmatically and judicially with the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria. The latter sent Egyptian bishops to Ethiopia whenever necessary until the rise of Islam. To perpetuate this Egyptian suzerainty over the Ethiopian Church, it became necessary to adduce legal justification. The Egyptians therefore inserted the forty-second Pseudo-Canon of the Council of Nicea, prohibiting the Ethiopians from occupying hierarchical positions. The authenticity of this Article was highly suspect to the Ethiopian clergy, but was nevertheless respected until the thirteenth century, when a new wave of independence arose. Once again it became necessary for the Egyptians, who did not wish to relinquish their prerogative, to renew the prohibition, and the same Article was inserted in the *Fetha Negest*, the politico-religious code under which the country was governed for more than six hundred years. Thus, an Egyptian bishop always remained at the head of the Ethiopian Church from its foundation up to the second half of the present century. This is a unique phenomenon in the history of the Christian Church.





*The new Cathedral of St. Mary of Sion, Aksum*

### - III -

#### **A PERIOD OF CONFLICT c. 700 - 1200 A.D.**

##### **The rise of Islam and its impact on Ethiopia**

The period following the rise and the rapid expansion of Islam in the Near and the Middle East was a very critical one for the Christian kingdom of Aksum. The whole civilization and culture of Aksum, as well as its economic life, was based on its international maritime connections. Ever since the Ptolemeys had taken a scientific and economic interest in the Red Sea area, Aksum had become an integral part of the Hellenic world. Aksum held the same position also during the Roman and Byzantine Empires. It was indeed not a mere coincidence that the Church in Aksum was established immediately after the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the State religion of his Byzantine dominions. There seems to be no doubt, now, that there were many individual Ethiopian and foreign Christians residing in the Aksumite kingdom, even before the formal establishment of the Church there. But the crucial step taken by Ezana to adopt the new religion and to make it a State Church followed upon a similar imperial decision by Constantine. It was also from the same area of the Eastern Mediterranean that the first Christian missionaries came to Aksum. Abuna Salama and others such as the Nine Saints came from the Byzantine world, and endowed the Aksumite Church with its earliest characteristics. These regular contacts continued down to the seventh century, and all important economic, political, and religious developments in the Byzantine world were also reflected in Aksum. With the rapid Muslim conquest, however, these historical channels of communication were almost completely cut off. Only with the Alexandrian Church did Christian Ethiopia continue to have a very precarious contact.

Before the rise of Islam, Aksum was an extensive maritime and commercial Empire. In its heyday, it ruled many districts in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula, across the Red Sea. It controlled

the land of the Beja, a people who inhabited northern Eritrea and what is now the north-eastern part of the Republic of the Sudan. In the west, the political and military sphere of influence of Aksum had already reached the Nile valley by the fourth century A.D.. Beyond the River Takazzé, the district of Semien and probably also the region as far as Lake Tana were within its territorial limits. However, it was in the south, in the predominantly *Agew* populated areas of Tigrai, Wa'ag, Lasta, Angot, and Amhara where the heritage of Aksum struck its deepest roots. When almost completely excluded from the Red Sea trade, and having lost its maritime international orientation, the kingdom of Aksum turned towards this *Agew* interior, and made it the centre of a distinctive Christian culture over the centuries.

The rulers of Aksum had acquired strong footholds in these central highlands already before the establishment of the Christian Church in the kingdom. They sent numerous expeditions of war and conquest into these areas from where they obtained tribute and a continuous supply of ivory, gold, and slaves. The Aksumite governor of the *Agew* was responsible for the long-distance caravan route to Sassou—somewhere near Fazogli in eastern Sudan—from where Aksum obtained much gold. These precious commodities were used for the international trade across the Red Sea in which Aksum was most active.

After their conversion to Christianity the kings of Aksum consolidated their power by establishing churches and military colonies in these central highlands. There are still today a number of churches—many of them dug out of the living rock in Tigrai and Lasta—which are attributed to the early Christian kings of Aksum. These churches and military settlements became centres of still further movements of small family groups from the more crowded parts of northern Ethiopia. In this way, the areas as far south as the region of northern Shoa were gradually affected by these slow population movements. Local traditions indicate that already in the tenth and eleventh centuries a number of small isolated Christian families had been established in the districts of Menz, Merhabite, Muger, and Bulga in northern Shoa. The spear-head of Aksumite expansion may have gone even further south and east. This seems to be suggested by the geographical distribution of some of the Semitic languages of Ethiopia - Amharic, Argobba, Harari, Guragi, and Gafat.

All these regions in which the Aksumites were expanding were originally pagan lands, and the people spoke different Cushitic languages. We have no historical data to show how these people lived, and how they were socially and politically organized before the advent of Aksumite rule. When the Aksumites conquered them, however, they imposed upon them their own religion, language, and political organization. It was this Aksumite impact on the *Agew* and *Sidama* interior of the Ethiopian region which resulted in the creation of a number of small, predominantly pagan kingdoms of which we have distant echoes in the traditions of early and late mediaeval Ethiopia. Among these, were the political units of the *Athagaw* (=Agew) mentioned in the inscriptions of the Aksumite kings against whom they fought long wars of resistance; the *Semenoi* (that is, the ancient people of *Semien*) who also fought against, and were conquered by the Aksumites; the pagan kingdom of Gojjam, (also of *Agew* extraction), which was only integrated into the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia in the fourteenth century; and the legendary kingdom of *Damot* (probably inhabited by Southern Cushitic or *Sidama* peoples), which was still very strong between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries in the whole region south and south-west of Shoa.

### The beginnings of the Zagwé Dynasty

One of these political units, the kingdom of Bugna in Lasta, later emerged in the twelfth century as the most dominant single power in the region, and took control of the inland Empire that was once ruled by Aksum. The new rulers are collectively known as the *Zagwé Dynasty* in Ethiopian history and they ruled the whole of the Christian kingdom until the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The power of Aksum had declined, and her commercial supremacy in the Red Sea area had been taken first by the Persians and later by the huge Muslim Empire which dominated the whole of the Near and Middle East and Northern Africa. The descendants of the ancient rulers of Aksum thus lost their Red Sea ports and much of the semi-desert coastal strip, and they seem to have concentrated their attention on their inland provinces south of Aksum. Even Aksum was apparently abandoned as a political centre by the ninth century, and the centre of gravity of the Christian kingdom moved to the region of southern Tigrai and what is today

northern Wollo.

For about three centuries this area remained the centre of the kingdom which revived, once again, with a new identity as a land-locked Christian Empire. It entered a new period of conquest and expansion, and, according to an Arab historian of the tenth century, its political sphere of influence reached the region of Harar and Zeila. The same historian tells us, however, that in the middle of the same century the kingdom had suffered a number of military reverses, and the southern part of its territory was conquered by an apparently pagan queen, the queen of the *Banu al-Hamulyya*, who had diplomatic and commercial relations with the Muslim kingdom of Yemen. The new political situation seems to have brought about a period of decline and internal conflict in the Christian kingdom. But the kingdom held on in the northern part of its territories until the new *Zagwé* rulers took over in the middle of the twelfth century as we have mentioned earlier.

The term "Zagwé dynasty" means the dynasty of the *Agew*. As already stated above its rulers came from the district of *Bugna*, in Lasta. Their homeland was apparently one of the most important strongholds of the *Agew* people in their centuries-old relations with the Semitized *Agew* kingdom of Aksum. It was probably here that the armies of ancient Aksum were confronted with very strong movements of resistance when they were expanding southwards. It was also probably here that the Aksumite governor of the *Agew* had his headquarters from where he protected the long-distance gold trade of Aksum in the sixth century. All the dialectical groups of the *Agew* peoples consider this region as the land of their ancestors, and as a point of dispersal in their traditions of population movements. It was therefore *not* accidental that the *Agew* dynasty of Christian Ethiopia should emerge from precisely the same area.

The *Agew* people of Wa'ag and Lasta had already been within the Aksumite kingdom since the early centuries of the Christian era. It has already been said above that many churches in this area are attributed to the early Christian kings of Aksum. It was also in southern Tigray and in Angot (northern Wollo), just next door to Wa'ag and Lasta, that the Christian kingdom had its political centre for three centuries after the decline and fall of Aksum. The *Agew* peoples of

these areas had therefore been profoundly acculturized by the Aksumite kingdom, and they had even adopted Christianity as their religion. The *Agew* kings of the *Zagwé* dynasty were therefore completely Christian from the start. They had, however, successfully resisted complete assimilation, particularly in a linguistic sense. Thus, although it is certain that they used Ge'ez as the language of their church services, they apparently continued to use their *Agew* mother tongue for their daily needs. Signs of this bi-linguality are clearly seen in some of the land charters given by the *Zagwé* kings in Ge'ez. In the major aspects of their rule, however, the *Zagwé* kings continued the cultural and political legacy of Aksum.

## -IV-

### REVIVAL OF THE CHURCH (1200-1526)

The capital of the Zagwé kings was at Adefa, at the present site of the town of Lalibela. From here they continued the Aksumite imperial tradition of conquest and Christian expansion. Here at Adefa they received and entertained many delegations from the Patriarchate of Alexandria, and probably also from the Muslim rulers of Egypt. Kings Yimraha and Lalibela, the greatest kings of the Zagwé dynasty, had many such contacts with the eastern Mediterranean region and particularly with Egypt. The traditions about the building of the beautiful churches of Yimrahanne Kristos and the Lalibela group of rock-hewn churches are dominated by allusions to such international contacts. The characteristic aspects of the building of these religious monuments are essentially loyal, however, to the best traditions of Aksumite architectural art. Thus, although it can be surmized that the Zagwé kings may have used artisans from the eastern Mediterranean countries, the conception of the buildings was clearly indigenous and no doubt derived from the Aksumite heritage of the Zagwé dynasty. Translations of many religious works from Arabic into Ge'ez are also said to date from this period. Despite later traditions to the contrary, therefore, the living achievements of the Zagwé dynasty clearly show that the period was one of cultural and literary revival in the Christian kingdom.

#### The 'Solomonic' Dynasty

This dynasty was overthrown by Yikunno-'Amlak, an Amhara warrior of the central province of what is now Wollo, which constituted the southern part of the Zagwé kingdom. Besides Yikunno-'Amlak's successful revolt against the Zagwé, a number of crucial historical factors brought about this drastic political change in the Christian kingdom.

Ever since the rise of Islam at Mecca, in the 7th century, the Aksumites had been losing their ancient ports and islands to the increasingly dominant Muslim merchants of the Red Sea. From these market stations on the seaboard, the Muslim merchants operated in the Christian highlands throughout the early mediaeval period. They gradually made a number of local converts to Islam, mainly in the major market villages and along the caravan routes. The right of public worship and free trade of these local Muslim converts was strongly championed by the Muslim rulers of Egypt who could always put pressure on the Christian Ethiopian kings through the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Until the tenth century it is very clear that these local Muslims were few in number, and their activities in the Ethiopian region were purely commercial in character. After the tenth century, however, their number began to grow and many Muslim settlements were established. These erstwhile commercial Muslim settlements gradually assumed much political significance. This historical development was particularly true of the hinterland of the port of Zeila which was becoming the most important commercial outlet for the Ethiopian region. By the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries a number of small Muslim sultanates were established along the trade routes from Zeila to the Ethiopian interior. The most important among these were the sultanates of Shoa, Ifat, Dawaro, and Bali. Since all these Muslim states were situated to the south and south-west of the central Ethiopian highlands, the Zagwé kingdom was growing more and more isolated and was receiving no benefits from the commercial exploitation of the rich regions of southern Ethiopia. The province of Amhara lay between the seat of Zagwé power in Lasta and these rich areas, and, when Yikunno-'Amlak raised his banner of revolt in Amhara, the isolation of the Zagwé rulers became complete.

The dynasty founded by Yikunno-'Amlak in 1270 is called the "Solomonic" dynasty. This appellation is a result of an historical process that seems to have started in the early mediaeval period. After the decline of Aksum, the Christian kingdom was surrounded by Muslim and pagan neighbours and was isolated from the rest of the Christian world except the Alexandrian Church. During all this period the most important religious book in the possession of the Ethiopians was the Holy Bible from which they took much inspiration. Taking account probably



of the similar beleaguered circumstances, the Ethiopians began to identify themselves with Israel, and to deliberately imitate and adopt many of the institutions of the Old Testament. The most important expression of this attitude is the gradual identification of the Ethiopian ruling house with the family of King Solomon of Israel. This tradition is embodied in the *Kebre-Negest*, compiled in the thirteenth century, which tells the Ethiopic version of the legend of the Queen of Sheba. The Solomonic tradition was particularly important after Yikunno-Amlak founded his dynasty. All his descendants adopted the name of the "House of Israel", and no one who did not belong to this house could accede to the throne in the whole of the late mediaeval period. All the male descendants of Yikunno-Amlak, except the reigning monarch and his minor sons, were kept under heavy guard on the inaccessible mountain top of Geshen. When a king died, it was from among the detained princes on Mount Geshen that his successor was chosen. This ingenious device gave a high degree of political stability to the mediaeval Christian kingdom, a stability which was essential in that period of intensive struggle with the numerous Muslim sultanates that had been established in the south and the south-eastern part of the Ethiopian region.

Yikunno-Amlak's grandson, King Amde-Seyon (1314-44), dealt effectively with these Muslim kinglets in the area. His quarrel with them was not merely religious. He wished to control their commercial activities by conquering the areas through which the trade routes passed, and to break the age-old isolation of his kingdom. In a series of long wars he conquered Ifat, Dawaro, Bali, Hadya, and the pagan regions to the west and south-west of these centres of Muslim trade. From this time on the Christian kingdom maintained its dominant position until the sixteenth century.

Just as in the preceding period of the Zagwé dynasty, the major aspects of the social, cultural, and military organization of the mediaeval Christian kingdom were a direct replica of the Aksumite kingdom. The "Solomonic" kings of mediaeval Ethiopia maintained the imperial traditions of ancient Aksum which remained their cultural and religious centre to the end of the period. Unlike the kings of Aksum, however, they did not build fixed urban centres or capital cities. They administered their huge unwieldy Empire from a series of peripatetic royal camps

which nevertheless had the same functions as permanent towns or cities. This arrangement increased the mobility of the royal court, and the effectiveness of the Christian army against local revolts. In a vast empire with numerous big rivers, great mountains and spectacular valleys, without roads and bridges, the task of maintaining sufficient control over their heterogenous subjects would have otherwise been impossible for the mediaeval kings of Ethiopia.

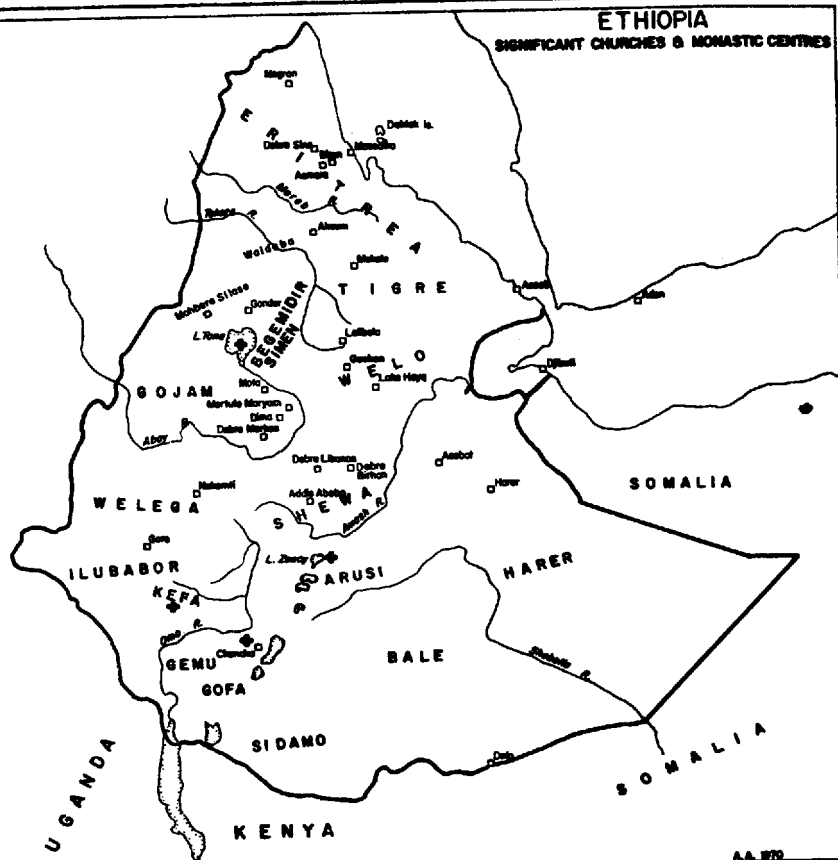
### **Monasticism and the Expansion of the Church**

It was within this historical milieu that the Church was making its impact felt in the Ethiopian interior. It has been mentioned in the second section above that the Nine Saints had instituted the earliest monasteries in the Aksumite kingdom. It is apparent that, together with numerous other monastic communities later established in Tigre and Lasta, these ancient monasteries continued to be the cultural centres of Ethiopia. Until the middle of the thirteenth century, they continued to provide educational facilities for the whole of the Ethiopian Christian highlands. From the traditions pertaining to the careers of Christian leaders in mediaeval Amhara and northern Shoa, it is very clear that any ambitious young man had to travel all the way to northern Ethiopia to obtain any serious religious and literary training. When they returned to their native districts, some of these men opened small schools where they taught some of the local children how to read and write. But until the middle of the thirteenth century, it seems that none of these small local schools in the south attained any particular significance beyond providing very elementary educational services for a handful of local children.

In about 1248, however, a young monk, Iyasus-Mo'a (c.1211-1292) came to Lake Hayq and opened a small monastic school at the island church of St. Stephen. Iyasus-Mo'a was born in Dahna, a small district of Lasta bordering on the River Takazzé. While still a young boy, he abandoned his home district, travelled to northern Tigre, and joined the famous monastery of Dabra Damo. There, he studied for many years under the abbot, Abba Yohanni, who later conferred on him the monastic habits. Iyasus-Mo'a had been a very serious student, and he had particularly distinguished himself as an outstanding calligraphist.

# ETHIOPIA

## SIGNIFICANT CHURCHES & MONASTIC CENTRES



He apparently copied many books while at Dabra Damo, and he is renowned for having left a large collection of manuscripts when he died at Hayq in 1292. The school he opened at Hayq became very famous as the first centre of higher Christian education south of Lasta. Many young men from the surrounding Christian communities joined his school. According to the hagiographical tradition about his life, one of his pupils was the founder of the "Solomonic" dynasty, King Yikunno-'Amlak (1270-1285), and there are more reliable indications that the island monastery of Lake Hayq continued to be one of the most important cultural centres of the "Solomonic" kings until the advent of Ahmad Gragn in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Many of Iyasus-Mo'a's pupils later acquired considerable fame as monastic leaders of the Ethiopian Church. Abba Hiruta-Amlak is believed to have been the founder of the important island monastery of Daga Estifanos on Lake Tana. Many others are said to have founded similar monastic communities in mediaeval Amhara and central Begemdir. One of the most outstanding pupils of Iyasus-Mo'a was Abba Takla-Haymanot of Shoa (d.1313). He apparently joined Iyasus-Mo'a's school as a middle-aged man with many years of clerical service in Shoa behind him. He spent some nine years with Iyasus-Mo'a who gave him his first serious Christian education. After having been invested with the monastic habits by Iyasus-Mo'a, Takla-Haymanot decided to visit the ancient monastic centres in northern Ethiopia. He went to Dabra-Damo and other places in Tigre where he remained for over ten years. In the meantime, he undertook further religious and monastic training and he apparently gained a much deeper insight into the history and ecclesiastical traditions of Ethiopia. He returned to Hayq with many followers after his long sojourn in Tigre. Iyasus-Mo'a now advised him to go back to his native district of Shoa and start a new monastic centre there. Takla-Haymanot returned to Shoa and, after many years of evangelical work, he established the monastery of Dabra Libanos which has become one of the most important religious centres of Christian Ethiopia.

Similar monastic leaders were emerging during the same period in northern Ethiopia, and they established other cultural centres. Abba Ewostatéwos (d.1352) deserves particular mention. He was apparently born in Gar'alta, in central Tigre, and he studied under his own uncle,

Abba Daniel, who was the abbot of Dabra Maryam there. He then left Gar'alta and began teaching in Sara'e, in what is today the province of Eritrea. There he was joined by many students who later founded their own monastic centres in the area. Ewostatéwos himself was persecuted by his colleagues in the Ethiopian Church for insisting on the Biblical custom of the observance of the Sabbath, and he left his country for Egypt, Palestine, Cyprus, and Armenia where he died after fourteen years of self-exile. He was accompanied by some of his pupils on his foreign travels, and some of them managed to return to Ethiopia after his death. Together with their colleagues who had remained in northern Ethiopia, these followers of Ewostatéwos effectively organized themselves and they became one of the two monastic houses of the Ethiopian Church. (The other is the House of Takla-Haymanot of Shoa.) Important cultural and educational centres like Dabra Maryam of Qohain, and Dabra Bizan (on the eastern edge of the Hamasen plateau) were later founded by the followers of Abba Ewostatéwos. Thus, by the fifteenth century, numerous monastic centres had been established at a number of crucial points from northern Hamasen to Lake Zuway in the south, from the eastern edge of the Ethiopian plateau to beyond Lake Tana in the west. And, just like the ancient centres founded by the Nine Saints, the new monastic communities provided the only educational facilities available in the Christian highlands.

### **Development of Christian Literature**

Each monastic community ran a number of schools depending on its size and its resources. A senior member of the community, specially noted for his learning and for his exemplary character, was given charge of each of these schools. The monasteries of Ethiopia vied among themselves for attracting well-known teachers, and the fame and prestige of a monastery largely depended on the quality of the teachers it employed. The courses given by each school were of course mainly religious, and they depended on the level of the school.

There were mainly four general levels of education in these monastic communities. The first level concentrated on training children how to read. They started with the Ethiopic alphabet, and they were drilled into reading a series of increasingly difficult passages. The ques-



*The new Church at Debra Libanos*

tion of understanding and comprehension was not important at this stage. It was strictly a "Reading" exercise. After sunset, following the evening prayers and the community dinner time, the children of the "Reading School" were taught to memorize and recite a series of increasingly difficult prayers. This "memorization exercise" often went on up to midnight.

The next stage was usually one in which courses in Church Music were given at different levels. Since the days of Yared, who is believed to have been divinely inspired to compose the first notes of the distinctively Ethiopian Church Music in the sixth century, a meticulous system of courses was organized in this field. It is apparent that this elaborate programme of musical studies was at the height of its development in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. The *Degwa*, the collection of hymns traditionally attributed to Yared, was most probably a cumulative product of many centuries. A major aspect of the Ethiopian Church Music is the ritual dance that always accompanies the liturgical chant. Monneret de Villard, a well-known student of Ethiopian Christian art and of the history of the Nile Valley, has suggested that the liturgical dance of the Ethiopians may have originated in ancient Egypt. But in its contemporary manifestations a religious musical performance of the Ethiopian priests is strongly reminiscent of the dancing and the rejoicing of the Levites in front of the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6:2-5). A casual look at the musical instruments used by the priests clearly shows that the Ethiopians have also drawn much inspiration from the Old Testament. The whole atmosphere created during a religious service in Ethiopia evokes the old Biblical scene transmitted in the last chapter of the Book of Psalms:-

Praise him with the sound of the  
trumpet: praise him with the psaltery  
and harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and  
dance: praise him with stringed in-  
struments and organs.

Praise him upon the loud cymbals:  
praise him upon the high sounding  
cymbals.

The third stage of education was *usually* what can be called the "Poetry School". It has not been possible to find out the definite origins

of this school, nor to ascertain the earliest period of its establishment. But there is no doubt that it had already developed by the fifteenth century, and it constituted one of the advanced levels of education in Christian Ethiopia. The most important aim of this school was to increase the level of comprehension of the Church scholar and to make him a master of the Ethiopic Grammar. An essential element of the training here is drilling the student to compose poems of different levels. In the evening, the student recited before his master the poems he had composed for the day, and the master commented on the form and the aesthetic qualities of the poems. When the student reached a tolerable degree of excellence the master promoted him to the next level. After all the students had finished reciting their poems, they gathered around the master who composed spontaneously a series of original poems. These were often known for their outstanding qualities in both form and content, qualities which the students vied among themselves to master and imitate. After the recital of each of his poems, the master explained what he meant by the lines of the poem, and this was followed by groups of his students meticulously analysing with him each of the words of every line to appreciate their grammatical and syntactical place in the poem. This session often went on well beyond midnight every day, and it was the major occasion when the scholars could have the personal guidance of their master. To pass through the eight or nine stages of this "Poetry School" a student often needed more than two years; but if the scholar had the intention of becoming a master himself, he usually spent as many as ten years visiting as many different masters as possible. The "Poetry School" was one of the most prestigious institutions to have gone through, and its inmates could hope for some of the highest positions in both Church and State.

The next and last stage was the mastery of the interpretations of all the canonical books of the Church. The Ethiopian clergy had developed an elaborate system of analytical studies of each of the Books of the Old and New Testaments. The canons of the Church were also studied in the same meticulous fashion with a lot of legal hair-splitting. These studies were so detailed that there was sometimes a special master for each of the Books of the Old and New Testaments, as well as for some of the apocryphal works of the Church.



These were the different stages of education in mediaeval Ethiopia. Although the content of the programme was strictly religious, there is no doubt that it solved the essential problem of developing the intellectual faculties of the scholar, and it prepared him for specific roles in the mediaeval Ethiopian community. What is more important is that the graduates of the monastic school system were employed not only in the Church but in all the various administrative, judicial, and other departments of the State. Nor was it with the limited prospect of leadership in the Church that students went to those schools. Indeed many of the royal princes who later ascended the throne — kings like Dawit (1380-1412), Zar'a Ya'iqob (1434-68), and Na'od (1494-1508) are known to have attended such schools. Zar'a Ya'iqob and Na'od were particularly noted for their considerable scholarship, and they were the authors of a number of important original compositions in the Ethiopic language. Prolific writers such as King Zar'a Ya'iqob and Abba Giyorgis of Gascha were products of the great monastic schools of the fifteenth century. The literary and artistic achievements of mediaeval Ethiopia were indeed outstanding. Many translations from Arabic, and numerous original Ge'ez works date from that period. A short visit to the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Haile Sellassie I University also gives some idea of the works of Christian art of those times. The library collections of the numerous island and mainland monasteries throughout Christian Ethiopia, even today, are a living testimony to the splendour of cultural life in mediaeval Ethiopia.

## PERSECUTION AND RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSIES

After the reign of Zar'a Ya'iqob (1434-68) and his immediate successor Ba'ida-Maryam (1468-1478), the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia had a series of minor kings who were too young to take the affairs of State in their own hands. This brought some of the more ambitious royal officials into temporary prominence as guardians of the Crown. But these officials had numerous rivals for power, and the whole kingdom entered into a period of political conflicts and civil war which lasted for about fifty years. The end result of this was the gradual weakening of the Christian army and the slackening of the frontier defence system. In the long struggle with the Muslim kingdom of Adal, this brought about a sudden change in the balance of power between the Church and Islam.

### The Wars of Ahmad Gragn

With the Ottoman conquest of the whole Near and Middle East, Islam was given a special impetus in the Red Sea area and in the Horn. The Muslim communities of the Ethiopian region began to be more and more aggressive particularly in their relations with the Christian Empire. Many Turkish and Arab mercenaries came over from across the Red Sea, better equipped with the superior arms of the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim invasion of the Ethiopian highlands in the beginning of the sixteenth century was thus a tremendous success. The leader of the Muslim forces during this conflict was Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim or *Gragn* as he is known in Ethiopian Chronicles. His Chronicle, entitled *Futuh al-Habasha* (meaning "The Conquest of the Abyssinians"), relates how the Muslim invasion was particularly aimed at destroying the Church in the Ethiopian highlands. As the centre of the mediaeval Christian culture of Ethiopia and as the place where the kings also kept

their fabulous treasures, the Church was attacked by the Muslim forces with particular fury. Dazzled by the riches of the churches and monasteries, the Muslim troops burnt and looted for a period of about fifteen years, and almost completely destroyed the mediaeval heritage of Christian Ethiopia. The following passage is a vivid description of how the island monastery of Hayq was sacked, and it characterizes the attitude of the Muslim army throughout the period of their success between 1531 and 1543:

"They carried off the gold . . . there were crucifixes of gold in great quantity, books with cases and bindings of gold, and countless idols of gold; each Muslim took 300 ounces; each man had sufficient gold plate to satisfy three men. They also took a vast quantity of cloth and silk . . . The next morning (the Muslim chief) sent the Imam three rafts loaded with gold, silver and silk; there were only five men on board, two in front and three at the back, the rest of the raft being covered with riches though it could have carried 150 persons. The cargo was unloaded in front of the Imam who marvelled at it and forgot the treasure which he had seen before. The rafts returned to the island and were a second time loaded with riches. They came three times, on each occasion loaded; they then returned to the island and the men went on board to return to the mainland. On the following day Ahmad partitioned the spoil; he gave one part to the Arabs and . . . one to the troops who had gone on the water; the rest he divided among the Muslims".

It was in this way that the material and spiritual heritage of Mediaeval Ethiopia was destroyed during the wars of Ahmad Gagn. Many of the inhabitants in the Muslim-occupied areas were forced to renounce the Church and adopt Islam. Although some chose to die for their faith, the large majority of the Christian peasants acquiesced to at least a nominal acceptance of Islam.

### **The Dilemma in Ethiopian Relations with Europe.**

The Ethiopian kingdom was later restored after the death of Ahmad Gagn (1543) and after the defeat of his army by Emperor Galawdéwos (1540-59) who was given effective military assistance by the Portuguese. Relations with the Portuguese had already started towards the end of the fifteenth century, and reciprocal envoys had been exchanged between Lisbon and the Ethiopian court. The Ethiopians were impressed

by reports of the technical advances in Europe and wanted to share in this material civilization. From the earliest stages of their contacts with Europe the Ethiopians expressed their desire to receive European technicians and artisans, and the kings were specially interested in fire-arms. Already in the fifteenth century some isolated European adventurers had reached Ethiopia even before the Portuguese, and they had been employed by the kings as masons, craftsmen, and amateur painters. When official relations were later initiated with the Portuguese, it was precisely their interest in the material civilization of Europe which preoccupied the minds of the Ethiopians. Emperor Libna-Dingil requested artists, builders, craftsmen, and men who could make guns for him. He also desired to establish a strong military alliance with the Portuguese. But outside these cultural and diplomatic contacts, a completely different interest preoccupied the Europeans in their relations with Christian Ethiopia. They failed to appreciate the spiritual self-sufficiency of Ethiopia and the extent of its commitment to the Church of St. Mark. Thus, almost completely ignorant of the history and the spiritual heritage of the Ethiopian Church, the Portuguese sought to act as the agents of the See of Rome. This caused a lot of unnecessary bloodshed in the first part of the seventeenth century, and led to the expulsion of the Jesuit mission by Emperor Fassiladas in 1632.

The Jesuit experience was very bitter for the Ethiopian Church, and it naturally led to the creation of very strong antipathies towards anything European for a long time. During their short sojourn in Ethiopia, the Jesuits had done a great deal of damage and they had seriously disturbed the spiritual stability of the Ethiopian Church. Thus, immediately after the official expulsion of the Jesuit mission, there was a very long period of intensive doctrinal controversies within the Church which lasted for over two centuries. When these controversies are seen in the right historical perspective, it is very clear that they arose from the need to re-examine the doctrinal positions of the Church and to purify the Church from possible external influences still lingering even after the expulsion of the missionaries. The end result of all this was an intensive movement of literary and intellectual revival in the kingdom of Gondar. What is most impressive is that, despite the decline of the monarchy and the disintegration of the State into a number of

regional entities during the so-called *Era of the Princes*, the Ethiopian Church preserved its basic unity. And from the middle of the nineteenth century, when the monarchy started to revive once again, the Church resumed its historic role as the most important unifying factor in Christian Ethiopia.

## THE PERIOD OF REORGANIZATION

### Tewodros and his religious policy 1855-1868

After the death of Abuna Qerillos about 1828, Ethiopia remained without a bishop until the appointment of Abuna Salama in 1841. The new bishop was a young, energetic man who had attended a Protestant college in Cairo. In Ethiopia, many problems awaited the young prelate, the chief among them being the political instability of the country, widespread doctrinal controversies within the Church and the activities of foreign missionaries. Abuna Salama demonstrated ability as an administrator of Church affairs and considerable political skill during a very trying period, while endeavouring to solve as many of the problems as he could with caution and wisdom.

His arrival in Ethiopia occurred during the period of Ethiopian history known as the Era of the Princes, when strong central government had broken down and the Emperors were puppets in the hands of ambitious nobles vying for power. During this difficult time, when the various provinces of the Empire were ruled by different local lords, the Orthodox Church had remained one of the few unifying forces in the country. Unfortunately the Church herself was divided by a doctrinal controversy over the Nature of Christ, which flourished throughout Ethiopia. From the beginning, Abuna Salama endeavoured to define the Alexandrian teaching on this matter and to persuade Church scholars to accept it and renounce erroneous beliefs. With regard to the problems posed by foreign missionaries, he assigned to them certain spheres of influence where they could teach but not baptize; he required new converts to be baptized by Orthodox priests.

Abuna Salama was, of course, unable to restore political unity to Ethiopia; this was the task undertaken by the Emperor Tewodros II. His reign inaugurated a new era in the history of Ethiopia, in both a

political and a religious sense. After his coronation by Abuna Salama in 1855, he set out to reunite the divided Kingdom and to restore Ethiopia to her ancient glory. A fundamental aim of his policy was to put an end to religious controversy in the Empire and to consolidate the Orthodox Faith. To this end, in 1855, he imposed the *Tawahdo* doctrine, propagated by Abuna Salama, as the sole doctrine to be allowed in Ethiopia.

At that time there existed three groups of doctrinal affinities which had been inherited from the past. The *Tawahdo* doctrine was and remains the official teaching of the Church of Ethiopia. It confesses the unity of two natures, divine and human, in the person of Christ, without confusion and without separation:—hence the name *Tawahdo* which means 'unity'. The second group was called *Qebat*, signifying 'unction', because it laid stress upon the anointing of Christ and not upon the incarnation of the Son. The third group was known as *Tsegga Lej* (Son of Grace) and supported the teaching of the 'Three Births': eternal birth of the Son from the Father, genetic birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary and birth from the Holy Ghost after the incarnation of Jesus. The Emperor Tewodros forbade the teachings of the *Qebat* and *Tsegga Lej* sects and all Christians were called upon to profess the *Tawahdo* teaching. Any who failed to abide by this decree were severely punished, thus his order was generally accepted and theological disputation gradually died out.

At the beginning of his reign, Tewodros showed deep religious faith and strict adherence to Christian moral standards. He and his wife received Holy Communion and in his conduct he became an example to all the Christians in the Empire. Many followed his example and began to lead a good Christian life. In the sphere of missionary work, Tewodros strongly supported the monks who devoted their lives to evangelizing the pagan inhabitants of the country. Many people, including numerous Moslems, became voluntary converts to Christianity.

Tewodros maintained good relations with the Church until he initiated certain innovations in Church organization. In order to carry out his far-reaching policies of modernization and reform, Tewodros desperately needed finance. He planned to raise money from the Church

by restricting the number of clergy allowed to serve in each church to two priests and three deacons. The remaining clergy would have to work and pay taxes like other people and some Church lands would be given to ordinary farmers, who would pay taxes on them. This proposal was unacceptable to the clergy and these and other actions exposed Tewodros to harsh criticism, so much so that the people in general supported the clergy against him. In the latter part of his reign, Tewodros' personality and conduct changed radically; he lost the high moral standards which had characterized the early part of his reign and grew harsh and bitter. Finally he became completely alienated from both the clergy and the ordinary people and Abuna Salama himself was imprisoned at Maqdala, where he died in 1867.

### **The expansion of the Church (1872-1913)**

In the last years of the 19th century the Church of Ethiopia was engaged in consolidation and missionary activities. In the work of consolidation the policy applied was the same as in the first part of Tewodros' reign. Doctrinal differences had once again become a subject of discussion in certain places. Now Emperor Yohannes and King Menelik of Shoa called a Council at Boru Méda, in Wallo, in 1878 in which many learned scholars of the Church participated. By coincidence there was no bishop in Ethiopia at the time, but this was not considered an impediment to the holding of the Council. The Emperor Yohannes had already acquired a letter from the Patriarch of Alexandria in which the official teaching of the Church was formulated, and this was accepted as binding by the clergy. The Boru Méda Council was the last of its kind. No such meeting has been held since. The *Three Births* teaching which held sway in many places was rejected and condemned as a heretical teaching; the followers of this sect were called upon to embrace the decision of the Council.

The Council was summoned in order to promote harmony and peace within the Church itself and thus to facilitate the missionary activities of the Church. The attention of the Church was concentrated on the Wollo region for historical reasons. The whole of Wollo had been a Christian centre with many historic churches and monasteries before the sixteenth century. In that century, however, the population



was Islamized by Ahmad Gragn. Later on, when the Christian religion was restored, the population remained predominantly Moslem. Both the Emperor Yohannes and Menelik II, then King of Shoa, encouraged the Church to carry on missionary work in this region. They themselves took an active role by becoming the god-fathers of prominent Moslem rulers of Wollo. The Emperor Yohannes baptized Mohammed Ali with the Christian name of Michael, also bestowing upon him the title of *Ras*, and King Menelik sponsored Abba Wattew, who later on was called *Dejjazmach* Haile Mariam. The conversion of their leaders had far-reaching effects on the population of the region. Many followed the example of their leaders and embraced Christianity. *Aleqa* Akale Wold, a well-known scholar, was selected to assist in the consolidation of the Christian Church in Wollo. He founded a centre of learning at Boru Méda itself. Boru Méda Sellase became renowned as a centre of higher Church education and students flocked there from all over the country.

In southern, western and eastern Ethiopia, missionary work was encouraged by Menelik II and many churches were built in different areas, which had become cut off from the Christian heartland of Ethiopia during the period of conflict. The re-integration into the Empire of these regions by Menelik revealed the ruins of many churches in addition to numerous ecclesiastical objects, evidence that these regions were once Christian and therefore Menelik insisted that they should be evangelized. A number of witnesses have described the joy with which the arrival of fellow-Christians was received by scattered communities which had endeavoured to cling to Christianity, although without priests and without the sacraments, since their separation from the northern provinces.

### **Autonomy 1926-1951**

In order to strengthen the organization of the Church and facilitate evangelistic activities, the Emperor Yohannes succeeded in obtaining the appointment of four bishops from Alexandria. This was the first occasion that more than one bishop had been appointed to the Ethiopian Church since the reign of Zar'a Ya'iqob (1434-1468), who had the privilege of acquiring no less than three bishops simultaneously. In

1881, the new bishops arrived in Ethiopia. They were Abuna Petros, the Metropolitan, and Abuna Mattéwos, Abuna Lukas and Abuna Yohannes. Abuna Petros remained close the Emperor, while Abuna Mattéwos was sent to Menelik II in Shoa, Abuna Lukas to Gojjam and Abuna Yohannes to Simen-Begemder, where his career was cut short by his untimely death.

At the dawn of the 20th century, a new wave of independence arose in the Ethiopian Church. Ethiopians recognized the futility of the apocryphal canon which prevented them from being prelates in their own country. Moreover it was strongly felt that reform and modernization of the Church could not be achieved by a foreign hierarchy out of touch with national life and problems. The common consensus was that the Church must be freed from the hegemony of the Coptic Church. Matters came to a head in 1926 with the death of Abuna Mattéwos, the last of the four Bishops who had been appointed in 1881. The Ethiopian Church approached the Coptic Patriarch with a request that authority should be delegated to the new Metropolitan to consecrate bishops. A lengthy exchange of views took place between officials of the Coptic Church and the Ethiopian Government. Finally in 1929, a new Coptic Abuna, Qerillos, was appointed and it was agreed that five Ethiopian monks should be consecrated as diocesan bishops. Five distinguished monks of irreproachable moral integrity were selected by a Church assembly in Addis Ababa. They were Abraham, Isaac, Michael, Petros and Sawiros, who died shortly after his appointment.

During the period of Italian occupation (1935-1941) the Ethiopian Church went through a very difficult period. Italian policy was aimed at undermining the immense influence wielded by the Church as a factor of Ethiopian unity. Abuna Petros and Abuna Michael paid with their lives for their steadfast patriotism and devotion to the Church. The monks of the great monastery of Debre Libanos were massacred in 1937 and other ecclesiastics suspected of sympathy with the national resistance movement were likewise martyred. The Fascist government wished to isolate the Ethiopian Church by severing its ties with Alexandria. Abuna Qerillos refused to be party to this and was sent to Rome; he later retired to Cairo in self-imposed exile. Thus the Church of Ethiopia remained without a Metropolitan, adding a canonical crisis to the moral crisis already prevailing in the country. Taking advantage

of this, the Fascist régime forced the aged and ailing Bishop Abraham to take the place of Abuna Qerillos and to declare the Ethiopian Church independent of Alexandria. The Patriarch of Alexandria then formally excommunicated Bishop Abraham and all who followed him.

Meanwhile the Church in exile was doing marvellous work abroad. The second highest-ranking ecclesiastical dignitary, the *Etchehé*, who was the late Patriarch of Ethiopia, Abuna Basilios, had his seat at Jerusalem and from there he dispatched priests to minister to the Christians in exile elsewhere and to convey to them messages of consolation and hope. With the Emperor, in exile in England, there was a sizable Ethiopian community. To them, Abuna Basilios sent five monks with the necessary sacred objects to administer the Holy Sacraments. He also used to send messages to the patriots of the Ethiopian resistance movement urging them to continue their struggle. The qualities of moral authority and integrity evinced by the *Etchehé* during this period helped to create a positive attitude of unity, enthusiasm and purpose among Christians in all walks of life and accelerated the movement towards the independence of the Church.

After the liberation of Ethiopia in 1941, Abuna Qerillos returned to Addis Ababa and negotiations were resumed between the Ethiopian Church and the See of St. Mark. The Ethiopians requested the granting of autonomy and the lifting of the ban of excommunication imposed in the time of Bishop Abraham. After very lengthy negotiations, agreement was finally reached in 1948 when the Coptic Synod decreed that Ethiopian monks might be appointed as bishops during the lifetime of the Metropolitan Qerillos and, upon his death, an Ethiopian Metropolitan might be consecrated. These concessions were accepted by the Ethiopian clergy as providing a solid basis for autonomy. Five learned monks were chosen by the Church assembly to be bishops; among them were the late Patriarch of Ethiopia, Abuna Basilios and the Acting Patriarch, the Archbishop of Harrar, Abuna Theophilos. Upon the death of Abuna Qerillos in 1951, Abuna Basilios was chosen as Metropolitan of Ethiopia by clergy and laity and thus the full autonomy of the Ethiopian Church was established. The movement for autonomy was fully supported by the Ethiopian Government from 1926 onwards and His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, played an outstanding role in this matter.

The history of foreign Missions in Ethiopia goes back to the 16th century. The first Roman Catholic missionaries arrived twelve years after the Portuguese expeditionary force which came to Ethiopia to assist the Christian Empire against the Moslem invader, Ahmad Gragn. After the victory over Islam, the Portuguese established themselves in the country and commenced their activities by preaching and opening schools in various parts of northern Ethiopia. Later on, in the 17th century, they were expelled and denied all access to the country. In the same century, the Protestant faith was introduced into Ethiopia by a German missionary, Peter Heyling, and began to penetrate to some extent among the inhabitants of Gondar. Peter Heyling came to Ethiopia not only to propagate Protestantism but also to study the Primitive Church. His knowledge of Ge'ez helped him to study the Ethiopian Church, but he failed in his mission of proselytization and was expelled from the country. Nevertheless, his teaching remained implanted in Ethiopia and it became necessary for the Ethiopian Church to prepare a doctrinal treatise in the Amharic language to defend its teaching and refute Protestantism.

The first half of the nineteenth century favoured the coming of foreign missionaries. The political and material aid which the Ethiopians now began to expect from Europe was the main reason for the influx. They established centres in many important towns of Ethiopia without serious opposition. The Roman Catholic Church had already dispatched missionaries in the later part of the 18th century, headed by an Ethiopian bishop, Monseigneur Tobeyas Gabra Egziabher. In 1846, the Holy See established two apostolic vicariates in Ethiopia, the northern area being entrusted to the Lazarists, later under Mgr. de Jacobis, and the southern area, the so-called Mission to the Galla, being given to the Capuchins under the leadership of Mgr. Massaia. Both prelates worked for many years in Ethiopia and attained considerable success. The coming of the Italians naturally militated in favour of the expansion of Catholicism in Ethiopia. However, eventually the Italians expelled almost all non-Italian missionaries from the country.

Protestantism did not expand with the same speed in Ethiopia. In the 19th century, the Bible Society printed the New Testament in Am-

haric and began to distribute it in Ethiopia. The Anglican Bishop, Samuel Gobat, played an important role in this respect. He twice visited Ethiopia and stayed in the major cities where he cultivated friendships among Ethiopians. He distributed the New Testament to various people. He was denounced by the Roman Catholics, however, on the grounds that he opposed the teaching of the Ethiopian and Catholic Churches concerning the veneration of the Virgin Mary and the Saints. Thus his prestige began to diminish and he left the country. Other Protestant groups transferred their activities to Shoa, where they were active only for a short time. Here also the Protestants were followed by the Roman Catholics who sought to arouse opposition to their teaching. In spite of strong reaction, Protestant Missions were established at Mankullo, near Massawa, and on the Eritrean plateau, where they have remained very active. Before the Italian invasion, some Protestant Societies had established centres at Addis Ababa and Debre Tabor.

After the war, in the year 1944, the activities of foreign missionaries were regulated by a decree. From this time onwards, the policy adopted towards foreign Missions by the Imperial Ethiopian Government has been consistent and reasonable. The aim of the 1944 decree was, if anything, to ensure complete co-operation between the Government and Missions in the interests of the welfare of the people.

Missions are permitted to operate educational and medical services in the so-called "closed" or "Ethiopian Church Areas." The teaching of Christian principles is encouraged, but proselytization for any particular church is prohibited among Ethiopian Christians. In the "open areas," i.e. areas predominantly non-Christian, no restriction is placed on missionary activities. Addis Ababa itself is an Open Area. Almost all the foreign societies operate Missions there today. Finally, Missions which have adherents in an Ethiopian Church Area have the right to teach and preach the Christian Faith of their own denomination to such adherents.

### **The Church Since 1951**

The autonomy of the Church was confirmed in 1959, when the title of the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was raised from Metropolitan to Patriarch. His Holiness, the late Abuna Basilios, was

installed as the first Ethiopian Patriarch. The governing body of the Church is the Holy Episcopal Synod, composed of the Patriarch, as its chairman, and six bishops. The Holy Episcopal Synod passes decisions concerning all Church matters except questions of dogma. The latter can only be examined and changed in consultation with the Coptic Church of Alexandria in particular and with all Oriental Orthodox Churches in general.

Today, the Ethiopian Church has fourteen dioceses each headed by an Archbishop, in addition to an Archbishop in Jerusalem. The Archbishop is of course responsible for religious life in his diocese and as a member of the Holy Episcopal Synod, he is required to implement the decisions of the Governing Body. Under his supervision are the following administrative units: the departments of mission work, youth and education and the church treasury. The seat of the Archbishop is in the provincial capital city.

The pattern of worship in the Ethiopian Church and, in particular, the practices of choral chanting of hymns and of sacerdotal dance help to explain the immense numbers of clergy in Ethiopia. A church service can only be conducted in the presence of at least two priests and three deacons. The nature of the hymns in use is such that they can only be performed by a reasonably large choir. For this reason, the number of *Debteras* (learned scribes or clerks who also act as cantors) is very high. No exact figure for the number of clergy in Ethiopia is available at present. In 1965 an estimate put the number of churches at 14,500 and the number of clergy at 200,000. The latter figure does not include the priests of Gojjam and Eritrea, however and both of these provinces are known to have large numbers of clergy.

The number of churches is proportionate to the number of priests. It is believed that there are approximately 15,000 churches in Ethiopia. Most of them operate schools offering elementary and secondary education. Today, there are two types of church schools. One is the unmodified traditional church school which offers instruction in the traditional subjects: reading, poetry, church music, scriptural and astronomical studies; the other type combines modern and traditional education. Such schools are found in the provinces of Shoa, Harrar, Tigre and Eritrea. The Church feels the necessity to adapt to the conditions and demands of modern life and educate its future leaders so

that they may fulfill their spiritual and social responsibilities in contemporary society. For this reason the Theological College of the Holy Trinity was created in 1945, where, in addition to traditional theological studies, courses are offered in Arabic, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. The Theological College is the first institution of its kind and is now a part of Haile Sellassie I University.

In the evangelistic field, the Church is engaged in both internal and external missionary activities. The Ethiopian Church has received requests from the Sudan, the West Indies, British Guyana and the United States of America for clergy to give instruction in the faith and minister to the needs of congregations in those countries. Although the Church has heavy responsibilities in this sphere in Ethiopia itself, these requests have received a favourable response and priests have been provided and branches of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church established in these countries. Within Ethiopia, each Archbishop has his own department of missionary work whose main tasks are preaching and baptism. Since the Liberation of Ethiopia in 1941, many non-Christians have received baptism and become practising members of the Church. Much work still remains to be done, however, in certain parts of Ethiopia.

Today the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is making increasing use of modern communications media to reach the people. Regular church radio programmes are broadcast on the two available radio stations, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service and the Voice of the Gospel. The Church has its own printing press, where many religious works are published, both in Ge'ez and Amharic, and also issues its own Amharic-language newspaper. Ge'ez, the ancient classical language of Ethiopia was once the sole language used by the Church, but today Ge'ez is no longer a living language and is therefore unfamiliar to all but the clergy and the scholarly world. For this reason, the Church has largely adopted the use of the vernacular, Amharic, in its services.

### **Ecumenism**

The Ethiopian Church became a founding member of the World Council of Churches in 1948. In the Assembly held at Amsterdam in the same year the Church was represented by Abuna Theophilos,

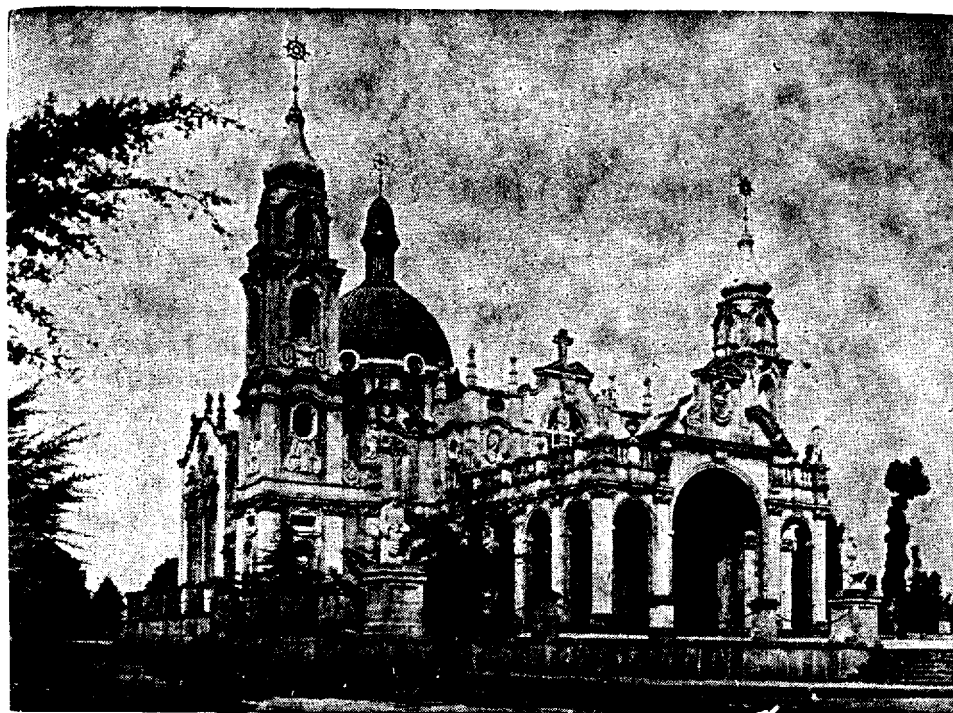
Bishop of Harrar and by Blattengeta Mersie-Hazen Wolde-Kirkos. Since then the Ethiopian Church has participated in all spheres of activity of the World Council, e.g. in the Central Committee, the Faith and Order Commission, the All-Africa Conference of Churches and the Youth Movement. A special committee was set up and entrusted with relations between the World Council and the Ethiopian Church. Through this committee, the Church has been granted aid from the World Council of Churches for two important projects. The first of these is the Kunama Project which has as its aim the evangelization of the predominantly pagan Kunama people of Western Eritrea. The second project is the establishment of a special school at Zuway in Shoa where dedicated young people receive appropriate training to enable them to undertake missionary work in the countryside. The school is already functioning and has attracted many young people with a sound Christian background.

The Ethiopian Church participated as an observer in the Vatican Council and was represented at all its sessions. This was the first occasion that the Ethiopian Church had opened at least indirect dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Ethiopian Church was represented in the same manner at the Panorthodox Conference at Rhodes in 1961. A dialogue began between Chalcedonians and Anti-Chalcedonians in 1964 at Aarhus in Denmark and was continued in 1967 at Bristol in England. Though no immediate concrete results have been forthcoming from these meetings, the establishment of personal contact and exchange of views is an important factor which may have far-reaching effects upon relations between the two groups in the future.

Meanwhile the Ethiopian Church remains desirous of preserving and strengthening its relations with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. When in 1965, the Heads of Oriental Orthodox Churches met together for the first time since the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., a new era in Church history was inaugurated. A Secretariat of Oriental Orthodox Churches has been established in Addis Ababa.





*Holy Trinity Cathedral, Addis Ababa*

## PART TWO

### FAITH AND ORGANIZATION

#### -VII-

### THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH

#### A Few Words of Introduction

A member of the Oriental Orthodox family of Churches, the Church of Ethiopia shares with them in essence a common faith. This faith, the Church believes, is derived from the Apostolic heritage and borne witness to in the New Testament against the background of the Old Testament. It has been expounded by the fathers of the Church both in the ancient Councils and in their teaching. It continues as a living reality in the Church in its life of worship, preaching and discipline. In a word, then the Church of Ethiopia is a community which has inherited and which holds to the historic Christian faith as it has been handed down through the centuries.

To write an essay on the faith of the Church as a chapter in a book is not an easy task. What is attempted here is, therefore, only to give a brief introduction to the faith of the Church of Ethiopia.

As a living reality, the faith is preserved by the Church pre-eminently in its liturgy. Even here it is the celebration of the Holy Eucharist that constitutes in a very significant sense the centre of the faith.

#### The Creeds

The Service of the Holy Eucharist proper begins with the recital of a Creed. In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church there are two credal statements in use. One of them is a fairly long profession which is believed to be of Apostolic origin, and the other is the Niceno-Constanti-

nopolitan Creed. The saying of the Confession of the Faith at the beginning of the Eucharistic Service signifies that the worship is meant only for those who accept the faith affirmed in it.

The ideas emphasized in the Creed of the Apostles may be noted here briefly.

1. God is one. He is the maker of all things and the "Father of our Lord and our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Although eternal and transcendent, He reveals Himself and exercises His supreme authority over all creatures.

2. With the one God the Father is the one God the Son who is born of the Father before all creation and is co-equal with the Father. The Son, in the last days, "took flesh from Our Lady Mary, the Holy Virgin, without the seed of man, and grew like men yet without sin or evil."

3. He suffered, died in the flesh, rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven to the Father who sent Him. He sent to us the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, and who is co-eternal with the Father and the Son. All this He did for our salvation.

4. All creatures of God are good and there is nothing in them to be rejected. Marriage and propagation of children are pure and undefiled, "because God created Adam and Eve to multiply". There is in our body a soul which is immortal and which does not perish with the body.

5. There is the resurrection of the dead, the righteous and sinners, and a judgement in which everyone will be recompensed according to his deeds.

6. Christ is not in the least degree inferior because of the Incarnation. He is unchangeably God the Word who became man for our salvation in reality. To Him be glory, praise and thanksgiving.

The other Creed is well-known and therefore does not need to be given in summary here. Both Creeds are based on an affirmation of faith in God, the Incarnation, and Human Salvation.

### **God the Holy Trinity**

God is the only eternal Being. Beyond time, space and all limitations,

He abides without a beginning and without an end. "Thou hast no beginning," says in prayer the Ethiopian priest who celebrates the Anaphora of St. John, "but Thou bringest all things to their end. Infinite art Thou, but for all things Thou didst set bounds."

God is the Creator of all that exists. Having made them all, He continues to sustain them. The Lord is high, says the Anaphora. Yet "all were created through His grace, and all live through His kindness". Perfect in Himself, He continually imparts perfection to His creatures. Individuals as well as the entire historical process are ultimately under His control. God is not a passive perfection or an abstract ideal, but a dynamic reality who is ever active in bringing all that exists to the final destiny which He has for each of them as well as for the whole created realm.

God is one in three and three in one. The unity of God is not conceived in the sense of an arithmetical digit nor of a solitary condition, but in that of an all-inclusive perfection. So the one God is also eternally three. He is, affirms the Anaphora, "three names and one God; three persons and one essence".

The unity of God is confessed as the unity of Godhead - Meleket as the word is used in Ethiopia. The one Godhead is shared equally and eternally by the three Persons - Akal as they are referred to in Ethiopia. As in other parts of the Christian world, in Ethiopia also there were men who tried to interpret the doctrine in various ways. There were, for instance, persons who refused to accept the personal distinctions in the one Godhead and others who insisted that the three Persons were three Gods. Both these views were rejected by the Church.

God is eternally Father, eternally Son, and eternally Holy Spirit. "The Father begat His son without days or hours; and when He begat Him, His Father was not separated from Him." Beyond time, God is the eternal One. That One is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. No one of the three Persons is prior to the other two in time. "The One was not before the Other," says the Anaphora, "and the Second was not before the Third." But "we proclaim that the Father lived with His Son, and that the Son lived with His Father before creation, and before the heavens and earth were made."

In the one co-eternal and co-equal Trinity, the Father is the eternal

Source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is born of, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from, the Father. While affirming that the Son and the Holy Spirit derive each of them His respective Being eternally from the Father, it is insisted that "the Father did not beget the Son to help Him in His work before the world was created, and the existence of the Holy Spirit is not to contribute wisdom and work."

It is not with the Deity as it was with Abraham who was older than Isaac, or with Isaac who was older than Jacob, but the Father is not older than the Son, neither is the Son older than the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not younger than the Son, neither is the Son younger than His Father.

The Father is different from the Son and the Holy Spirit only in that He alone is Father. The Son alone is Son, and the Holy Spirit alone dwells in us and makes God known to us. So the priest who celebrates the Anaphora of St. John says in prayer, "But Thy living Holy Spirit knoweth the depth of Thy godhead. He has declared to us Thy nature, and told us about Thy oneness. He taught Thy unity, and helped to know Thy Trinity." The one Godhead is, therefore, in the Father in perfection. From Him the same Godhead is received in perfection by the Son through His eternal generation; and from the Father again the same Godhead in perfection is derived eternally by the Holy Spirit. It is affirmed at the same time with equal force that "the Father is not greater than the Son, and the Son is not less than His Father," and the Holy Spirit is not greater or less than either the Father or the Son. Thus the unity of God is affirmed by confessing that the Godhead is one, and that the Godhead is eternally in the Father. The Son and the Holy Spirit

There is also another equally important emphasis regarding divine unity. This lies in the affirmation that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternally and inseparably together. In everything that the Father does, the Son and the Holy Spirit are there with Him; in all the things that the Son does, the Father and the Holy Spirit are there with Him; and in all activities of the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son are also with Him. It is affirmed that "the Father, being Father, doth not give orders to the Son; and the Son, being Son, is not exalted; and the Holy Spirit is equal. But the divine Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, one kingdom, one authority, and one government."

If we may put the emphasis in our words, the term "Father" with reference to God signifies the divine reality which originates everything; the Son indicates the divine reality implying all that is originated; and the Holy Spirit signifies the divine reality which dwells in creatures relating them both individually and corporately to God. The eternal God, as we have noted already, is the all-inclusive perfection. He creates all things; He sustains them; and He guides them to a final destiny.

Infinite love, God creates and sustains the world and all that there is in it. In His love God the Father sent His Only Son into the world in order to accomplish its salvation; in the same love God the Son came and worked out the world's salvation; in the same love again God the Holy Spirit perfects the salvation thus given. All these are manifestations at different levels of the same activity of God in relation to the world.

### **The Incarnation**

The Incarnation of God the Son is primarily for the salvation of the world. Salvation means the restoration of the world to its direct and unimpeded relation with God.

As God made it, the world was very good. But evil came there in it. God who made the world is ever concerned and active to save it from the clutches of evil and restore it to the destiny for which it has been created. Incarnation is God's supreme act in saving the world.

God the Son entered the earthly realm of existence in a unique way by taking over Himself a perfectly real human life.

As creation is the work of God, redemption is also God's work.

God who created the world made man as the crown of creation. Made in God's image and endowed with creaturely freedom and auto-

mony, man seeks God and reflects on His being and nature. Through the wrong exercise of man's freewill there came on him and the world at large misery and suffering as well as sin and evil. The salvation of the world, therefore, requires pre-eminently the healing of man. It is this healing which the Incarnation is believed by the Church to have aimed to accomplish.

In the Incarnation, God the Son united to Himself real and perfect manhood. Conceived in her womb by Mary the Virgin through the work of the Holy Spirit, He was born in the world as a real man. At the very moment of His conception, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, a personal manhood was formed in the Virgin's womb in union with God the Son. Thus God the Son united to Himself the manhood taken from the human mother and was born as perfect God and perfect man in the real sense.

Jesus Christ, the incarnate God the Son, is one Person, continuous with Godhead and continuous with manhood. In Him Godhead and manhood continue, each in its integrity and perfection, in a state of indivisible and unconfused union. On this ground the Church of Ethiopia, with the other Oriental Orthodox Churches, affirms that Jesus Christ is not two natures, but one incarnate nature of God the Word. The "one" here is not meant to ignore the dynamic continuance of either Godhead or manhood in the one Christ, but to confess a real incarnation whereby God the Son entered the world of ours as a man. He is indeed God the incarnate Son even while He is found to undergo the frailty of manhood.

Living as He did a life of unbroken communion with God, He was absolutely sinless. Maintaining this union in the most inward and real sense, He entered into our battle with sin and evil as a man, and fell a victim to our death. By His suffering and ignominious death on the cross He scored a victory over the forces of evil, and by His resurrection from the dead He lives eternally in His natural unity with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and in His unbroken and indivisible union with the manhood.

**The Ethiopian Church** holds to the view that He is God the Son in His incarnate state. Born of God the Father eternally as God the Son, He was born of the Virgin Mother as a real man. There are a number of affirmations in the Anaphora regarding Him, some of which may be noted here.

1. Jesus Christ was born of Our Lady Mary for our salvation. He who does not believe in His birth from Holy Mary, let him be anathema.

2. In this way, after being conceived in the womb of the Virgin, God the Son was born as a man. By His conception, God the Son became incarnate "taking our nature." The Son who is born of the Father without a mother, was born as a man without a father. "He put on mortal flesh and made it immortal," and He came truly into the world "clothed in the body which He took from us."

3. His human birth was a unique event, whereby God the Son "came down through the will of His Father" and was made man. "His humanity was not inferior because He had no Father to be born of His seed." This is incarnation, whereby God the Son entered the historical realm in order to save it for ever.

4. In the Incarnation, God the Son united to Himself manhood and "made it one with his Godhead without mixture or confusion, without division or alteration." Therefore, "His Godhead was not separated from His manhood, not for an hour, nor for the twinkling of an eye."

5. God the Son came to us "without being separated from His Godhead." After being born, "He grew like an infant, and grew little by little until He matured like a man. At the age of thirty He was baptized in the Jordan." He was tempted by the devil; "He hungered and thirsted," He went about "preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven." By this, He who is perfect like God the Father and is His image walked among us in our image.

6. He suffered passion and death voluntarily on our behalf and for our sakes. He became hungry as man, and granted food to many with very little bread. He thirsted as a man who dies, but changed water into wine as being able to give life to all.



They beat Him on the head as a servant and He set free from the yoke of sin as Lord of all. He suffered all. He cured the blind with His spittle and gave us the Holy Spirit by receiving the spittle of the unclean. He who forgiveth sin was accused as a sinner by them. The judge of judges was judged by them. He was crucified on the tree to destroy sin, was crucified with the sinners to enrol with the righteous. He died through His will, and was buried willingly; He died to destroy death, He died to give life to the dead; He was buried to raise those who were buried, to keep the living, to justify the impure, to justify the sinners, to gather together those who were scattered, and to turn the sinners to glory and honour.

Such passages in the Anaphora are too numerous to be reproduced or even noted in the present context. They show that Jesus Christ was at once God and man without division or confusion. The same Christ, God the Son incarnate, expressed the divine actions as well as the human. He is one Christ, in whom God and man are indivisibly united.

7. As to the absolute reality of the suffering and death, there are passages almost without number. We shall reproduce here two of them, one taken from the Anaphora of St. James of Serug, and the other from the Anaphora of St. Dioscorus. The priest who celebrates using the first of these two Anaphoras says in prayer:

O Lord, Thou wast struck with the hands of a servant, beaten with sticks, pierced with a spear, and they caused Thee to drink a little gall with vinegar. While Thou wast God, able to prevent them, Thou didst not prevent them, Thou didst become patient even to death; all this Thou didst accept for the love of man.

The Anaphora of St. Dioscorus contains the following passages bearing on the point at issue in the present context. The priest says there in prayer:

He was laid in the manger of the cattle, received the presents of His kingdom, and wept as infants do, asking for food from the breast of His mother.

As to suffering and death in particular, we have passages like the following.

They crucified Him on the tree, nailed Him with nails, beat Him on the head with sticks, pierced His side with a spear, to Him who gave drink to the Israelites from a rock they

gave to drink gall mixed with myrrh in His thirst.

The immortal died, died to destroy death, died to quicken the dead as He promised them with the word of covenant.

8. Death was not the end of His dispensation. "He rose from the dead, absolutely without corruption and set us free from the yoke of sin." The risen Christ ascended into heaven and is with God the Father. He has triumphed over death and decay.

These and the many other passages in the Liturgy show that the manhood of Christ was absolutely real and perfect. But everywhere the emphasis is on the unity of Jesus Christ. It is affirmed that He is God the Son in His incarnate state. As regards the Incarnation, it is clearly shown that He was conceived in the Virgin's womb, and that He was born as a real man. At the very moment of His conception, through the Holy Spirit, actual manhood was formed from the human mother in union with Himself. It is to Him who was thus conceived that the Virgin gave birth. Therefore, Jesus Christ is indivisibly one. The two natures of Godhead and manhood which came into union in Him continue in the one Christ, each in its absolute integrity and perfection with its respective properties, without change or division. Each of them continues in its dynamic reality, not in a quiescent state, so that Christ is God and man at the same time.

The Church of Ethiopia, with the other Oriental Orthodox Churches, has refused to accept the Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith with the affirmation that Christ is "made known *in* two natures." If by this expression the Churches which accept the Definition mean only that Godhead and manhood continue in the one Christ dynamically, this is *the* teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On the other hand, if the expression is taken in the sense that Godhead and manhood continue in Christ only in a state of moral union, there is a basic difference on this issue between the Churches of the Chalcedonian tradition and the Church of Ethiopia, which should be noted.

### Human Salvation

The Incarnation is first and foremost for the salvation of the world. The salvation of the world means pre-eminently the redemption of the human race. The saving work of God accomplished through the Incar-

nation is to be appropriated by man, both individually and corporately. It is when this is done with reference to the entire human race that the work of salvation of the world will have been perfected. God Himself is carrying on this work through the Holy Spirit.

In his life and existence man includes both the individual and the corporate dimensions. The saving work accomplished by God in the Incarnation should, therefore, be assimilated and perfected in both these dimensions. It is to carry on this divine work that the Church is founded by God. The incarnate, crucified and risen Christ is in the Church, which is His body on earth, through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works in the Church through individual members as well as its community as a corporate body, in order to make the saving activity of God real to them. This is done through the various ministries of the Sacraments, preaching and teaching. In this way individual persons are inspired to dedicate their lives, and both individuals and communities are guided to carry forward the ministry of Jesus Christ in the social, economic, political and such other spheres of human life for the well-being of man and the world at large.

This concern is given expression to in the Anaphoras of the Church of Ethiopia by including prayers for all these areas of life in the world. Thus prayers are offered for rains, that God may send them where they are needed; for waters of the rivers, that "God should fill them unto their due measure and bounds"; for the fruits of the earth, that "God may grant to the earth her fruit for sowing and for harvest"; and for the prevailing of the spirit of peace for the people. In the same way every liturgical celebration includes intercession for the Emperor as the Head of the State and for ecclesiastical leaders. Besides, traders, farmers and craftsmen, as well as those in need, sickness or oppression are specially remembered. Prayers are also offered for those who have fallen in any manner of sin. All these show that the entire realm of nature and all conditions of men and women are committed to divine protection and care at every service of worship.

The Christian's ultimate concern in life is not understood in terms merely of the hope for a blessed life in the world to come. On the other hand, this world itself is affirmed to belong to God. But the fact of evil in it is admitted, both in the natural realm and in the moral realm.

Salvation is a present experience consisting in man's complete confidence and communion with God as well as his perfect peace and harmony with his fellow beings. This state of being which should be ours here and now should grow till it reaches its final culmination in the eternal realm. Thus salvation is a present reality which has a future reference. The Church has the responsibility to inspire its members to work for the well-being of life in the world here and now and to proclaim the hope of eternal life in the world to come.

In this world man is entitled to individual freedom, social justice, economic sufficiency and such other rights as will enable him to develop his talents for the good of himself and of others. The Church as a body should stand for the realization of these rights. However, the Church of Ethiopia does not agree with the view that the Christian's concern is only to work for the welfare of man in this world. This world and our lives in it are nothing but transitory. No man can be absolutely sure of what will happen to him tomorrow. Furthermore, material prosperity does not as a rule lead to a peaceful life, either for the individual or for peoples and nations. In any case, the Church of Ethiopia does not think that its mission is to build up exclusively a city in this world. The hope in the life of the world to come is an integral part of its faith.

The Apostolic Creed which is in use in the Church of Ethiopia has three sections bearing on our discussion in the present context. The first of them insists that "all creatures of God are good and there is nothing to be rejected, and the spirit, the life of the body, is pure and holy in all." The entire natural realm has been made pure and holy by God and all that is for man's regular use. The second passage affirms that "marriage is pure, and childbirth is undefiled, because God created Adam and Eve to multiply." This is a clear statement which shows that, in the faith of the Church of Ethiopia, human society is of divine creation, so that the social, economic, political and other such ties of man are divinely instituted. In the third passage there is the confession that we "believe in the resurrection of the dead, the righteous and sinners; and in the day of judgement when everyone will be recompensed according to his deeds." This statement affirms the eschatological hope in the Church's faith.

Putting the three ideas together, we can say that according to the faith of the Church of Ethiopia, the natural realm has been created by

God, who has Himself placed man in the world as a member of society. There is a destiny awaiting man, and that is to be attained by him in the risen life in the world to come. In the face of evil and sin in this world of ours God has worked out man's salvation through His incarnate Son, who rose from the dead and lives eternally, offering us the assurance of a resurrection that will be ours also.

### **A Word in Conclusion**

The eternal and triune God who is beyond time and space has created the world in time and space. He has redeemed the world and continues His work of perfecting the saving act. The salvation was accomplished by God through the suffering, death and resurrection of His incarnate Son and is perfected through His Holy Spirit.

It is this saving work of God that is represented in every celebration of the Holy Eucharist, which is not merely a memorial service to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But in it the Church offers itself and the whole redeemed human race together with the natural realm of earthly existence to the triune God. This is why in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, as also in its various other acts of worship, the Church calls to remembrance the living and the departed sections of the communion of saints. This is done in the context of remembering the saving acts of God, not merely as past events, but as events which happened actually in the realm of history and which signify the continuous work of God for the salvation of the world. The Service of the Holy Eucharist brings to us above all the assurance of the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith.

We proclaim Thy death, Lord, and Thy holy resurrection, we believe in Thine ascension and Thy second coming. We glorify Thee, we offer our prayer unto Thee and supplicate Thee, our Lord and our God.

Grant us, Lord, to do Thy will and Thy good pleasure at all times, and write our names in the book of life in the kingdom of heaven with all saints and martyrs, through Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom, to Thee, with Him and with the Holy Spirit be glory and dominion, both now and ever and world without end.

Amen.

## THE HIERARCHY

The hierarchy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is directly within the living tradition of the Universal Church. As such it is continuous with the tradition borne witness to in the Scriptures and the hierarchy of the early Church.

Etymologically, the word hierarchy means the rule of priests. It is derived from the Greek **HIEREUS** (priest) and **ARCHÉ** (rule). The term hierarchy never occurs in the New Testament. **ARCHÉ** is used in the New Testament never in the sense of ecclesiastical authority. Instead, **EXOUSIA** (power or authority) is used on a few occasions; such as in relation to the works of Jesus, the Ministry of the Twelve and the Apostolic authority of St. Paul to build the Church (Matt. 9:6; 10:1; Luke 9:1; II Cor. 10:8). The character of **EXOUSIA** in all these is one of **DIACONIA** (service or ministry). All those who hold authority in the Church have it from the Lord, who Himself came to 'serve'. **ARCHÉ** may be understood as **EXOUSIA** which is essentially **DIACONIA**. Thus hierarchy may receive its correct meaning when it is qualified by 'ministerial'; and hence, hierarchy is 'priestly ministry'.

The hierarchy of the Ethiopian Church consists of the traditional three orders of episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate. Of these three orders, the episcopate is most central, and it is by the same that hierarchical continuity is preserved in the Church.

### Episcopate

The episcopal continuity is the primary factor in the Apostolic succession of the Church. It signifies the call and commission of the Apostles by our Lord, as well as the transmission of the Apostolic faith. The Church is a Church of all ages and the Apostolic succession is the

link that binds them all to our Lord. Since the Church maintains the Apostolic faith and is 'sent' by the Lord to proclaim it (cf. Matt. 28:19-20) the Church itself is Apostolic. The Apostolic ministry of preaching and of administering the sacraments is exercised in the Church. The episcopate is a concrete symbol of the Apostolic succession, and it keeps the Church united on the principle of ministerial leadership.

The Ethiopian hierarchy is traced to the Church of Alexandria. St. Frumentius, a Christian from Syria, as the first missionary to Ethiopia and as closely attached to the Aksumite court during the middle of the fourth century, was consecrated by Patriarch Athanasius of Alexandria as the first bishop (ABUNA)\* of the Ethiopian Church. Thereafter, the hierarchical head of this Church was always sent from Egypt until recent times.

In the years following the Muslim invasion and persecution, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Ethiopian Church had to pass through a period of crisis which seriously affected the hierarchy. Even before this time, the Jesuits had been working to bring the Ethiopian Church under the jurisdiction of Rome, although with no success. After these disturbances, the hierarchy was fully restored in 1881, when four Egyptian bishops were sent to Ethiopia; on the death of the last of them, the Church pleaded with the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria for the consecration of men of Ethiopian nationality as bishops for this Church. As a result, five Ethiopian bishops were consecrated in 1928. The recognition of the autonomy of the Church of Ethiopia was marked by the consecration of five other Ethiopian bishops in 1948 (one of whom, the late Abuna Basilios, was made Archbishop in 1951) and was sealed by the installation of Abuna Basilios as the first Patriarch of Ethiopia in 1959 by the Patriarch of Alexandria.

Today the Ethiopian Church is an autocephalous Church in every respect, and it holds that its doctrine and hierarchy belong to the living tradition which has been transmitted to posterity since Apostolic times.

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\* ABUNA in Ge'ez means 'our father'. St. Frumentius is affectionately called ABBA SALAMA (father of peace).

such as parents' care for children, teacher's for students, superior's for inferior and the like), through its hierarchical ministry over the proper functioning of the different Spiritual gifts and services within the Body of Christ. The Ethiopian clergy, through their private conversations, personal contacts and sermons, exhort the people to exercise their Christian duties in the best way possible. After the worship, the priests regularly meet the people in the Church premises to instruct them in faith and tradition. They also act to settle domestic disputes among the members of the Church.

The clergy act in obedience to the bishop of the eparchy within which they are given to serve; and the bishop, besides his administrative responsibilities, exercises pastoral supervision over the ministry of the clergy. Thus, the bishop of an eparchy represents the unity within it.

When a bishop exercises his EPISCOPE, he exercises it in the Church and for the Church. When a priest exercises his ministry in a parish he is helping the bishop under whose supervision he is given charge to see to the order and unity within the local unit of the Church. When a deacon assists the bishop and the priests, he is serving them to carry on 'their tasks', and the congregation is always with them in the unity of the Spirit and service.

Such an organized diocesan life is one unit of the organized life of the whole Church, in which the Patriarch is the centre. As a bishop is the symbol of unity in each eparchy, the Patriarch is the symbol of unity of the whole Church.

### **Certain Distinguishing Features of the Ethiopian Hierarchy**

Being an autocephalous Church, the Ethiopian Church has its constitution based on the principle of self-government in which the hierarchy and laity share and co-operate. It has always been the official Church of Ethiopia, and has been supported and protected by the Emperors of Ethiopia. All important nominations within the Church are subject to the approval of the Emperor, who is acknowledged as the "Defender of Faith."

Even though Ethiopia had no national Patriarch until recent times,



## **The Hierarchy and the Laity**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church shares with many other Churches the belief that the Royal Priesthood of all Israel and the Aaronic institutional priesthood have become one in Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest. The people of the New Covenant constituted in Him possess His Royal Priesthood, and are called after the Old Testament fashion, "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (I Pet. 2:9). All those who are properly baptized within the Church are members of this priestly community.

After the pattern of Jesus' baptism and anointing with the Spirit the Church has the washing of regeneration, baptism, and the granting of the Spirit, Chrismation, (cf. Tit. 3:5). Following the ancient custom of the Church, the two are administered together in the Ethiopian Church. As the sealing of the Spirit, Chrismation constitutes the lay ordination into the sacramental and active life of the Church. Thus, every baptized and anointed person is a member of the Royal Priesthood. The hierarchical orders are special ranks within the Church, the People of God (LAOS TOU THEOU), from which the term laity is derived.

The Apostolic, priestly and ministerial functions of the Royal Priesthood are a means whereby Christ works through His Body in the world. The Church being the Body of Christ acts as one body; and the ministry of the Church, thus, is a ministry acted as one whole. Yet it is recognized that there is a distinction among the members based on the diversity of ministries and gifts of the Spirit, interdependent and inter-related among themselves. They include prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, contribution, aid-giving, merciful acts, apostleship, pastoral work, healing and administration (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:7-14; I Cor. 12:27ff). The gifts are given in variety, but by the same Spirit (I Cor. 12:4ff).

Thus, the hierarchy is not regarded as a separate class, but as a constituent part of the People of God. All ministry in the Church is the ministry of Christ to the Church and through the Church to the world. Because of this, the hierarchy does not function separately but in close union with the laity in the Church's teaching, worship and government. The laity are given vital roles to play in the life of the Church in many spheres.

## **Hierarchy and Sacraments**

Within the wider ministry of the whole Church the hierarchy is set apart by further ordination. The sacraments as means of grace are conveyed to the faithful by the hierarchy's ministry of grace.

The Ethiopian Church regards Ordination as a sacrament, and insists that for the administration of sacraments there must be validly ordained persons. In Ordination the invisible divine grace is transmitted to the ordained with the visible sign of laying on of hands of the bishop.

By Ordination, one is given the divine grace for the fulfilment of a particular function, and thus one is set apart for that particular priestly ministry. It is to be fulfilled in the Church and is meant as a service to the world. At Ordination, special grace is granted to the ordained by the Holy Spirit, which enables him to appropriate individually the grace granted corporately to the community.

At Ordination the members of the hierarchy take a vow that they will hold fast to the faith and tradition of the Church and will teach the same to the members of the Church.

The single grace of the sacrament of Ordination is distributed among the three grades of episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate. Although by Ordination the ordained is appointed to carry out concretely a function of the Royal Priesthood, it is not simply the apportioning of a place by the Church, but it is a setting apart by the Holy Spirit chiefly for the sacramental ministry in the Church and for the wider service with the Church to the world.

### **The Place of the Hierarchy in the Unity and Order within the Church**

The Ethiopian Church recognizes that the inward essential authority of the Church is Christ Himself, who exercises it through the Holy Spirit, the Power of God that dwells within the Church. The institutional authority in the hierarchy is believed to express the activity of Christ. As an institutional organ, the hierarchy is responsible for the organized life of the Church.

An organized ecclesiastical life is expected to foster the exercise of all kinds of EPISCOPÉ (i.e. oversight, supervision or watchful care,

there had always been an ETCHEGÉ\* besides the ABUNA to hold the administrative authority of the Church. The power of ordination and pastoral supervision belonged to the ABUNA, while the juridical responsibilities were the rights of the ETCHEGÉ. The ETCHEGÉ always was an Ethiopian, a celibate monk, nominated by the Emperor in consultation with the Church. With the emergence of autocephalous status this double office has been vested in the Patriarch.

The three-fold hierarchical structure, namely, episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate, has subdivisions under each of them. Thus episcopate includes Patriarch, Archbishops and Bishops.

The Ethiopian Church has the custom of having numerous priests assisting the Rector of the local Church. In the cities, the Rector of a parish is made by appointment. Honourable titles are given to the Rectors of the important city Churches. It is of interest to mention a few of them. NEBURA'ED is a title given to the Rectors of Aksum Church and of the Church of St. Mary, Addis Alem in the Shoa Province. NEBURA'ED means 'one upon whom hands are laid', and it refers to an office of authority. The NEBURA'ED of Aksum is also the governor of the Aksum district. LIKE SILTANAT (chief of the authorities) is the title given to the Rector of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa. There are, besides, other titles such as LIKE LIKAWENT (chief of the learned), MELAKE SELAM (angel of peace), MELAKE GENNET (angel of paradise), MELAKE HAIL (angel of power) and others. As a significant feature in rural areas the accession of the chief-priest to his status is not by appointment. One among the local clergy emerges to this status on the basis of character, ability, virtues and personal qualities. Next to the Rector of each church is the GEBES, a priest who is the treasurer, holding authority over the church property.

Besides the priests there is a group of deacons in every church, assisting the presbyters in worship and administration. Each church has its own Archdeacon as leader among the deacons.

The class called DEBTERA is a unique feature of the Ethiopian Church. As an order of singers, it corresponds in some ways to the choirs in other Churches. Although the DEBTERA do not belong to

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\* ETCHEGÉ in Ge'ez means 'Elder', and it is a title of authority.

the ordained hierarchy, they are a class by themselves, to be found in every Ethiopian Orthodox Church, closely associated with the priests and deacons in assisting the services of worship. They have their required education and practice in Church music. Their ecclesiastical dance, performed with solemnity and sanctity, makes their role in the Ethiopian Church distinctly unique. With rhythmic movements, steps and musical accompaniment their performance adds to the beauty of the worship and of special festive celebrations.

Until the present day, many of the churches and Church institutions have remained the source of basic elementary education for the Ethiopian population, and the hierarchy plays a key role in it. Until the introduction of modern education, the teaching ministry was the prerogative of the teacher-priests of the Church.

The tie between the ecclesiastical and political authorities is so firm that even in times of wars, conflicts and crises, the Church, under its hierarchy, has stood with the Emperors, rendering support and encouragement.

In conclusion, the statistics of the present Ethiopian Orthodox hierarchy deserve our attention. The first Patriarch, His Holiness Abuna Basilios, died in October 1970. At the time of his death, there were fifteen bishops, including Archbishops.

At present, the Church has an estimated number of 60,972 priests, 12,078 monks, 56,687 deacons and 39,010 *Debteras*.

Most of the clergy have their required education in the ecclesiastical language, Ge'ez. A small percentage of them have received modern education. Ge'ez is a rich language with a large mass of theological, historical and biblical literature, with which many doctors of the Ethiopian Church are well-acquainted.

## WORSHIP IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Church of Ethiopia is one of the few Churches of Christendom where the worship of the primitive church has been preserved. This is largely due to the geographical position of Ethiopia and to the historical developments that led to her virtual isolation from the rest of the Christian world from the seventh century, as a result of which Ethiopia retained the form of worship she had received in the 4th century. It is of interest to consider this subject in broad outline.

### 1. The Place of Worship

The noted church historian Rufinus has provided us with information that confirms the existence of prayer houses in Ethiopia before the introduction of Christianity as the official religion. In the story of St. Frumentius and his brother Aedesius he tells us that "while they lived there and Frumentius held the reins of government in his hands, God stirred up his heart and he began to search out with care those of the Roman merchants who were Christians and to give them great influence and to urge them to establish in various places conventicles to which they might resort for prayer in the Roman manner."

According to traditional sources, after the official acceptance of Christianity as the state religion, the Emperor Ezana, the first Christian ruler of Ethiopia, built a magnificent church at Aksum. It was supported by thirty-two monolithic columns and had no arches. During the early Christian period old temples of pagan times were transformed into churches. The old Sabaeen temple at Yeha was made into a church by Abba Afsé, one of the Nine Saints who came to Aksum from the Roman Empire in the 5th century. Recent archaeological excavation of the eastern corner of this building brought to light Christian objects, such as bells and crosses, of great antiquity. The same can be said of

the church of Abba Pantaléwon, in a suburb of Aksum. The site was once a centre of pagan worship; both Sabaeen and Greek gods were worshipped there. Abba Pantaléwon either transformed the ancient temple into a church or else built a church upon the ruins of the temple.

Excavations in the area of the old Aksumite kingdom, at Adulis and Hawlti-Melazo, have brought to light the ruins of basilicas of a Syrian type. This may be due to the influence of the Nine Saints, since the majority of them are believed to have been of Syrian origin. An existing example of the basilica type of church is found at the ancient monastery of Debre Damo. According to hagiographical sources, the church was built by the Emperor Gabre Meskal, son of Caleb, in the 6th century. During the same period a remarkable church was built at Sana'a by Abraha, the Ethiopian viceroy of Yemen. This church was much admired by Arab writers. It was known as *al-qalis*, a corruption of *Ekklesia*. Abraha brought architects both from Aksum and Byzantium and they designed a church that was a marvel of architectural skill, combining the basilican and Byzantine styles.

In the mediaeval period the basilica form was retained, but underwent modification in certain cases. The amazing monolithic churches of Lalibela are developments of this period. The churches of Medhane Alem (Saviour of the World) and Gennete Maryam (Paradise of Mary) are decorated by external columns of a type completely new in the architectural history of Ethiopia. The interiors have many features in common with the old church of Aksum. The external facade of Bete Emmanuel (Church of Emmanuel) is reminiscent of the Aksumite style of alternate recessions and projections. The churches of Lalibela, hewn as they are out of the living rock, may be said to be among the architectural wonders of the Christian world. The interiors are hollowed out and decoratively and ingeniously carved, with varieties of vaulted roofs and complex arches. Each church is constructed in a different style.

In the late mediaeval period, ecclesiastical architecture underwent a radical change. Churches of octagonal or circular shape were constructed. It seems probable that these forms were increasingly adopted as Ethiopian power moved southwards and the churches acquired the form of the round dwellings common in the south. This type of circular or octagonal church is abundant in the southern and western areas



*A procession of Tabots on the Feast of the Epiphany*

where Christianity was introduced later. The basilica form has been retained to a large extent in northern Ethiopia.

The internal structure of the circular and octagonal churches consists of three concentric rings. The innermost part is the *Maqdas* or Sanctuary, also known as the *Qeddusu Qeddusan* or Holy of Holies, where the *Tabot* or Ark rests; only priests and deacons have access to it. The *Tabot* represents the Ark of the Covenant, believed to have been brought to Ethiopia by Menelik I, the son of King Solomon. It rests upon the *Menbir*, which may be said to correspond to the altar in other Churches. The sanctity of a church depends upon the presence of the *Tabot* and without it services cannot be held. The blessing of the *Tabot* by the Abuna constitutes the consecration of the church. On occasions when the *Tabot* is removed from the church and carried in processions as on the Feast of the Epiphany it is covered with a cloth and everyone bows or prostrates himself to it on passing. The second chamber is the *Keddist*, which is reserved for communicants, who receive the Sacrament, the women segregated from the men. Only those who feel pure, have fasted regularly and have conducted themselves blamelessly receive Communion. For this reason communicants are usually babes-in-arms, infants and the very old. The third division is the outer ambulatory which is known as the *Qene Mahlet* (the place of the cantors). The *Qene Mahlet* is divided into three sections by curtains. The western part is occupied by the *Debteras* or cantors who sing hymns and praise God to the accompaniment of musical instruments, drums, prayer-sticks and sistra. One part of the ambulatory is reserved for women only and one part for men. There are three doors, to the east, north and south. The latter is used as the only entrance by women. The other two entrances are used exclusively by men; men may also sometimes use the women's entrance, but women never use the men's entrance. Those of the congregation who feel particularly unclean ritually stand in the churchyard throughout the service. Often there are as many people, if not more, in the churchyard as in the church. It should be noted that the church precincts and the surrounding wall are considered sacred, therefore those who remain outside the church during the service are considered to have attended church.

A few modern city churches are built in the traditional Alexandrine cruciform. They contain pews for the congregation. It is customary in



such churches for men and women to sit on separate sides of the church. The traditional Ethiopian church contains no seats, however. Rush mats may be spread upon the floor and it is customary to remove one's shoes before entering the church. As the services are lengthy, prayer-sticks, known as *Makomiya*, are provided for the *Debteras* and for elderly or important members of the congregation to lean upon. However the truly devout may refuse to make use of a prayer-stick during the service and a few exceptionally pious people may try to mortify the flesh by standing upon one leg only throughout the service.

## 2. The Times of Worship

### Church Services

One can distinguish two types of church service in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, indoor and outdoor. The former is conducted in the Holy of Holies by priests and deacons. A minimum of five persons, two priests and three deacons, is required to celebrate Mass. In certain monasteries a minimum of seven persons is still required. The celebrants are required to abstain from food for at least twelve hours in advance. The sacramental bread and wine are prepared by one of the deacons in the compound of the churchyard, in a small building known as the Bethlehem. The times of the services depend upon fasting periods and holy days. During fasting periods the service commences at 1 p.m. In some churches and monasteries it may begin as late as 3 p.m. The normal duration of a service is about two hours, but it may be lengthened or shortened upon occasions. At Easter, Mass is celebrated at 1 a.m. and at Christmas about 4 a.m. is the usual hour. On Sundays the service usually commences at 6 a.m., although it may start earlier and in some monasteries and churches the usual hour is 5 a.m. In some churches in Addis Ababa, the service now begins at 7 a.m. and at 8 a.m. on Saturdays except on Holy Saturday when the service is conducted at midday.

The times of the outdoor services, conducted by priests and *Debteras* also vary. On Sundays the service begins at 7 a.m. until replaced by the service in the Holy of Holies. During fasting seasons, the service commences at 6 a.m. and continues until the beginning of Mass at 1 p.m. There is also a short service towards the end of the Mass which consists

mainly of the reciting of *Qene*, or verse which is epic in type.

### 3. The Types of Worship

#### a) Liturgy

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has retained the ancient service of the Early Church and still uses the Mass of the Catechumens. In the Early Church, adults receiving instruction in the Christian Faith would attend the Mass until the reading of the Gospel and the sermon. Then the deacon would dismiss the Catechumens and they would leave the church. The Mass is still retained in the Ethiopian Church, though there are no longer Catechumens under preparation for baptism.

The real liturgy begins after the point in the service marking the departure of those not yet baptized. The Church of Ethiopia has fourteen Anaphoras\*, a unique phenomenon in any Christian Church. Each is used on special occasions to mark the observance of a particular holy day. Though the Anaphoras differ in length and content, they have common characteristics. They stress the Incarnation, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. In principle the Mass is conducted in Ge'ez, the ancient classical and liturgical language of Ethiopia. Today, however, the readings and certain portions of the liturgy are in the vernacular, Amharic. The congregation, both men and women, may join in the singing. Choirs of the western type are unknown in the Ethiopian Church.

#### b) Se'atat, the Horologium

There are two types of *Horologium*, for day and for night. The *Horologium* was composed by a distinguished 15th century scholar, Abba Giyorgis of Gascha; during the ensuing century it was gradually enriched by additional hymns and prayers. In big churches it is usual for monks, priests and deacons to conduct the Se'atat in the northern part of the ambulatory, while the *Debteras* are conducting a different service.

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\* See Chapter X.

### c) Mahlet

Cantillation is an integral part of worship in the church of Ethiopia. Hymns are sung in different modes and rhythms. The *Degwa* or hymnary is attributed to Saint Yared, a scholar who lived in Aksum in the 6th century. During the course of the centuries, hymns have been added by various composers. The cantors or choristers are the *Debteras*. On joyful occasions they chant and sing to the accompaniment of musical instruments, hand-clapping and rhythmical movements of a dignified and solemn kind. The rhythmic beat is marked by the movement of the prayer-sticks carried by the *Debteras*. During periods of mourning, the chanting is in a melancholic mode and is not accompanied by hand-clapping or rhythmic movements. During Lent, the use of the drum is forbidden except on Palm Sunday. From the beginning of Lent until Palm Sunday, a special hymn is sung called *Tsome Degwa*. Throughout Holy Week, special prayers are said, accompanied by prostration, culminating on Good Friday. During this week extensive readings from the Bible, works of the Church Fathers and Lives of the Saints take place.

## 4. Manner of Prayer

The *Fetha Negest*\*, or *Law of the Kings*, reminds us that prayer is man's way of communicating with Almighty God. In prayer, man thanks God, praises Him and recognizes His domain, confessing his sin and seeking on his part the way of pleasing Him. The following precepts are laid down for one who prays. Firstly, he should stand up, as enjoined in the words of the Lord: "When you rise up for prayer, you shall stand up." Secondly, he should gird himself with a girdle, as the Lord has said "Let your loins be girt." Thirdly, he should turn towards the east, for that is the direction from which Christ will appear in His second coming. Fourthly he should make the sign of the cross from the forehead downward and from left to right. Fifthly he should recite the prayer in fear and trembling. Sixthly he should kneel down

\* We are indebted for the information in this section to *The Fetha Negest, The Law of the Kings*, translated by Abba Paulos Tzadua, published by the Faculty of Law, Haile Sellassie I University (Addis Ababa, 1968), Chap. XIV.

and prostrate himself, since the Gospel tells us that on the night of His Passion, Our Lord prayed prostrating Himself and kneeling.

Prostration plays an important part in worship in the Ethiopian Church. The faithful are enjoined to begin prayer by prostrating themselves once or thrice and to do the same at the end of the prayer. At certain times kneeling or genuflection is substituted for complete prostration, i.e. on Sundays, the days of Pentecost, the feast days of Our Lord and Our Lady, and also after receiving the Eucharist. On Good Friday, the faithful spend the whole day at church, usually in the courtyard, performing the act of prostration many hundreds of times, to the limits of their physical strength.

## 5. Times of Prayer

The faithful should pray seven times each day. First upon arising from bed in the morning and before beginning work. Secondly at the third hour; thirdly, at the sixth hour; fourthly, at the ninth hour; fifthly, the evening prayer; sixthly, the prayer before sleep and lastly, the mid-night prayer.

The morning and evening prayers should be said in church, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. Anyone who omits prayer, unless he is ill, should be cut off from the congregation of the faithful. Anyone who is sick should attend church if he possibly can, for he may be healed. The other prayers should be said at home. When the hour for prayer arrives and one of the faithful finds himself in a place where he cannot pray, he should pray mentally.

## 6. Fasting

In the *Fetha Negest*\* fasting is defined as follows:

“Fasting is abstinence from food, and is observed by man at certain times determined by law, to attain forgiveness of sins and much reward, obeying thus the One who fixed the law. Fasting [also] serves to weaken the force of concupiscence so that [the body] may obey the rational soul.”

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\* *op. cit.*, Chap. XV, p. 93.

Fasting is strictly observed by all faithful members of the Church. There are approximately 250 fast days in the year, although not all of these are compulsory for everyone. The average person may fast about 180 days in the year. There are seven official fasting periods for Ethiopian Christians.

- 1) All Wednesdays and Fridays, except for the 50 days after Easter.
- 2) The Lenten Fast of 55 days.
- 3) The Nineveh Fast of 3 days.
- 4) The Vigils, or *gahad* of Christmas and Epiphany.
- 5) The Fast of the Apostles; this varies in length, depending upon the date of Easter, and may be a minimum of 14 days and maximum of 44. This fast commemorates St. Peter and St. Paul.
- 6) The Fast of the Prophets of 43 days.
- 7) The Fast of the Assumption, 15 days in August.

Of these fasts, the Fast of the Apostles and the Fast of the Prophets are compulsory for clergy only, although they are also observed by many of the faithful. All the other fasts are considered obligatory for all devout Christians, except children under seven. During fasting periods, Christians abstain from meat and all animal products: meat, milk, butter and eggs. No food or drink is taken before noon, at the earliest; even then only a simple repast should be taken. Pregnant women, the seriously sick and travellers are exempted from fasting. In Holy Week no food is taken before 1 p.m. or later. The really devout fast completely from Good Friday till Easter Sunday, while others eat only the evening meal on these days.

The Lenten Fast is traditionally broken by a joyful feast that takes place after Midnight Mass, at about 3 a.m., or the first cock-crow on Easter Sunday Morn.

## 7. Holy Days or Feasts

Nine major and nine minor holy days are observed in the Church of Ethiopia. All are connected with events in the life of Christ.

### **Major Holy Days**

1. The Incarnation
2. The Birth of Christ
3. Epiphany
4. Hosanna (Palm Sunday)
5. Crucifixion
6. Easter
7. Debre Tabor (Feast of Mount Tabor, the Transfiguration)
8. The Ascension
9. Pentacost

### **Minor Holy Days**

1. Sebkat (First Sunday in Advent)
2. Birhan (Second Sunday in Advent)
3. Nolawi (Third Sunday in Advent)
4. Christmas Eve
5. Gizret (Circumcision)
6. Birth of Simeon
7. Debre Zeit (Feast of the Mount of Olives)
8. Kana Zegalila (The Miracle of Cana)
9. Maskal (The Invention of the True Cross)

Other feast days include one for each of the twelve Apostles. The martyrs, St. George, St. Stephen and St. John the Baptist are also commemorated. Other important holy days are those in commemoration of St. Michael and St. Mary and of the great religious reformer, the Emperor Zar'a Ya'iqob. No less than thirty-three holy days are devoted to St. Mary, an indication of the special veneration attached to the Blessed Virgin in Ethiopia. A feature of feast days in the Ethiopian Church is that many of them are commemorated monthly and not only annually. As in the rest of the Christian world Sunday is observed as a day of rest. In former times Saturday, the Biblical Sabbath, was also observed. On holy days believers are expected to refrain from heavy labour and manual tasks, such as farming, forging metal and weaving. Various transactions are permitted, however. On these days it is customary to carry out charitable and philanthropic acts, to visit the sick or those in prison and to arrange reconciliations between those who have quarrelled. Sundays and other holy days are also occasions of social events, weddings, dancing and sport.



*The Church of St. Mary, Addis Alem*



## **THE ROLE OF THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN LITERATURE AND ART**

### **Ethiopic or Ge'ez Literature**

Ethiopia occupies a unique place among African countries south of the Sahara, having evolved her own literary language, Ge'ez, in very early times. A vast body of literary works in Ge'ez grew up from the fifth century A.D. onwards. Almost all of these works are religious in content. Religion lies at the very core of Ethiopian civilization and the Ethiopian Church has been not only the storehouse of the national culture, but also its propagator, instrumental in shaping and moulding Ethiopian literature and art. Ethiopian men of letters have, in almost all cases, also been men of the Church and many scholars consider that the most distinctive attainment of Ethiopian culture lies in the vast collection of manuscripts, compiled and preserved in the monasteries and churches, which embody the national literary tradition. Their subject matter and their style are strongly imbued with religious concepts.

It is interesting to note that while many of the literary works extant in Ge'ez are based on translations from Greek, Syriac, Coptic and in later times, Arabic originals, in every case the work in question has been not merely translated but, in Professor Ullendorff's phrase, has been "conveyed into the spirit and ambiance of Christian Abyssinia". In other words, these works have been submitted to such a process of adaptation and transformation that instead of being mere copies or hackneyed translations they stand as literary works of art in their own right.

### **The literary achievements of the Aksumite Period**

**c. 5th - 7th centuries A.D.**

The major literary achievement of this period was the translation

of the Holy Scriptures into Ge'ez. This great undertaking was the work of a group of learned Syrian monks known as the Nine Saints who came to Ethiopia in the fifth century to escape the Byzantine persecution of the Monophysites. The translation of the Old Testament was based upon the Septuagint while the New Testament was rendered from the Lucianic recension current in Antioch at that time. The Ethiopic Bible contains 81 Books; 46 of these comprise the Old Testament and 35 are found in the New Testament. A number of these Books are apocryphal or deuterocanonical, such as the Ascension of Isaiah, Jubilees, Enoch, the Paralipomena of Baruch, Noah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Maccabees, Moses and Tobit. They are of intrinsic importance to scholars either because no other complete version of the text is extant in any language other than Ge'ez or because the Ge'ez version is authoritative.

Perhaps the most important of these apocryphal works is the Book of Enoch, which has been preserved in Ge'ez alone. The name Enoch signifies "teaching" or "dedication" and Enoch is one of the great Biblical characters, the first-born son of Cain. The Book of Enoch was lost for centuries to western scholars who knew it only because it is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Jude, until, in 1773, James Bruce brought three complete manuscripts to Europe. This great prophetic work may be summarized in five parts as follows:

1. The laws governing the heavenly bodies.
2. An account in the form of visions of the history of the world until the Last Judgement and the coming of the Messianic Kingdom with its centre at the New Jerusalem.
3. The establishment of a temporary kingdom that heralds the approach of the Last Judgement.
4. A vision of Enoch and others and his journeys through earth and heaven.
5. This section contains the Similitudes and describes the coming of the Messiah as the judge of all mankind.

Other early Ge'ez works of significance which have been mentioned in a previous chapter include the famous work known as *Qerlos*, the great collection of Christological writings which opens with the treatise by St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, known as *Haymanot Rete'et*,

or *De Recta Fide*. On this book is based the teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Another work translated at this period was the *Ascetic Rules of Pachomius*, which established the rules governing monastic life in Ethiopia. It is interesting to note that the same period saw the translation of a secular work, the *Physiologus*, the well-known work of natural history, which was very popular in Europe during the Middle Ages.

### The Solomonic Restoration

After the decline of the Aksumite Empire, towards the middle of the eighth century, Ethiopia entered a tenebrous period from which literary documents have not survived (or yet been discovered). A great period of cultural renaissance followed upon the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty about 1270, however, and the fourteenth century was the beginning of what has been termed the 'Golden Age' of Ethiopian Literature. Although Ge'ez was no longer a living language it retained its primordial role as an ecclesiastical and literary language, like Latin in the western Church. In addition to works of a theological or dogmatical nature we find the beginning of the great series of Royal Chronicles of Ethiopia with the reign of Amda-Seyon (1314-44). The chronicle of Amda-Seyon is an outstanding work. This vivid and compelling account of Amda-Seyon's struggles against the Moslems was certainly the work of an eye-witness and denotes a new phase of Ge'ez literature. To the same period dates the earliest known Amharic text; a collection of soldiers' songs celebrating the victories of Amda-Seyon. From this time onwards, royal chronicles became a regular feature of the Ge'ez literary development in Christian Ethiopia.

This period also saw the composition of the *Kebre Negest* or *Glory of the Kings* which is perhaps the most significant work of Ethiopian literature. It was composed by the *Nebura'ed* Yeshaq of Aksum and combines history, allegory and symbolism in its re-creation of the story of the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon and their son, Menelik I of Ethiopia. The great achievement of the author, Yeshaq, lies in the way he has gathered together and syncretized all the myriad strands of this great cycle of legends and stories which is woven into the very fabric of Ethiopian life.

Other works of this period include the *Mashafa Sa'atat* or *Horologium*, a very popular work attributed to Abba Giyorgis of Gascha. The *Weddase Maryam* or *Praises of Mary* is, as the name implies, a collection of hymns and laudations dedicated to Our Lady and ordered according to the days of the week. It is ascribed to Abba Salawa, who also engaged in a revision of the text of the Bible.

A new genre of literature which appeared was devoted to the lives of the saints and martyrs. Well-known works of this nature are the *Gadla Sama'etat* or *Acts of the Martyrs* and the *Gadla Hawaryat*, or *Acts of the Apostles*. But the most important of these is the *Senkessar* or *Synaxarium* which has been translated by Sir E.A. Wallis Budge under the title *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*. This is a compilation of the lives of the saints arranged in order of their feast-days throughout the year. In general these works are devoted to the struggle and sufferings endured by the saints and martyrs in defence of their faith. The torments inflicted upon them are described as well as their patience in affliction, their working of miracles, their martyrdom and, after death, their receiving of the Crown of Glory. Mediaeval Ethiopian literature is particularly rich in hagiographies. The lives of well-known saints, such as Saint Antony and Saint George enjoyed great popularity and the lives of such famous Ethiopian saints as St. Takla Haymanot and Gabra Manfas Keddu provide important source books for Ethiopian Studies. In many manuscripts the whole volume is occupied with the life of a single saint and the miracles wrought by him both in his lifetime and after his death. Such manuscripts often contain beautiful illustrations.

Two important original works appeared in the early fifteenth century. The first of these was the *Fekkare Iyasus* or the *Explication of Jesus*, an interesting work, messianic in tone and foretelling the coming of a king called Theodore (Tewodros) who would restore peace to suffering humanity. This prophecy became of considerable importance in Ethiopia until the middle of the nineteenth century when King Theodore II chose this throne name, apparently because of its associations with the prophecy. Another philosophical work was the *Mystery of Heaven and Earth*, setting forth the eternal struggle between good and evil.

The reign of the Emperor Zar'a Ya'iqob (1434-1468) was notable

for the development of great literary activity. Zar'a Ya'iqob himself was a zealous reformer and wrote several important works, such as the *Mashafa Berhan*, or *Book of Light* and the *Mashafa Milad* or *Book of Nativity*. The king sought to refute heresies which had taken root and to attack the corruption of religious practices. Other works which have been attributed to him include the hymn collections entitled the *Arganona Maryam Dengel* or *Organ of the Virgin Mary* and the *Egziabeher nagsa* or *God has reigned*. Numerous edifying homilies were produced during this period, the most famous of these is the collection entitled *Retu'a Haymanot* (True Orthodoxy) ascribed to St. John Chrysostom.

The beginning of the sixteenth century saw many changes in Ethiopia. The Moslem invasions caused great destruction to the nation's Christian heritage. Many churches and monasteries were destroyed together with their collections of manuscripts. However enough survived to preserve national traditions. An interesting literary figure of this period was a certain Embakom (Habakkuk) an Arab convert to Christianity who entered the celebrated monastery of Debra Libanos. He was the author of the *Ankasa Amin* or *Gate of Faith* and of a number of translations from Arabic. A series of important literary works was inspired at this period by the need for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to define her position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic influence. The best known of these is the *Confessio Claudii*, or *Confessions* of the Emperor Claudius (1540-59), a spirited exposition of the Alexandrine Faith. Other works are *Sawana Nafs* or *Refuge of the Soul*, *Fekkare Malakot*, *Exposition of the Godhead*; and *Haymanota Abaw* or *Faith of the Fathers*.

No summary of Ethiopic literature would be complete without mention of the great work known as the *Fetha Negest* or *Laws of the Kings*. The *Fetha Negest* is indeed the repository of Ethiopian ecclesiastical and civil law and as such a literary work of fundamental national importance. Throughout its history, the *Fetha Negest* has been closely linked with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which still observes many of its precepts. The *Fetha Negest* was always faithfully conserved in the monasteries and important churches. There it was available for consultation; there also it was studied and taught by leading ecclesiastical scholars. Even in modern times it has served as the basis or inspiration of much civil and penal law.

## Liturgical Works

The liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church serves as the central point for the whole service conducted by priests and deacons. It is written in the form of a litany. Portions or passages of prayers, chants and hymns which are said by priests and deacons differ from those said by the faithful. As the liturgy is sometimes referred to as the "Drama of Salvation", it is acted out like a drama, telling the life and teachings of Christ, relating the sufferings of the Saints and Martyrs of the Church and using many symbols such as the Cross with its signs, the Censer, the Bell, the Chalice, the Container for the holy water, the washing of hands by the Chief Priest, the bows and the whole elaborate vestment of the priesthood.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, at least two priests and three deacons are required to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. No Mass can be performed after taking meals. Hence, the Holy Eucharist always takes place before any meal.

According to the teachings and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the liturgy consists of two main parts, some of which are sung while other portions are read aloud by the priests.

The first part of the Mass is known as the Synaxis and includes the reading of the Epistles and Gospel, while the second part is called the Anaphora or Canon. This is the sacramental part of the Mass which consists of fourteen Anaphoras: of these, the standard one in most common use is the Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles.

These Anaphoras may be listed as follows:-

1. The Anaphora of Our Lady Mary
2. The Anaphora of the Apostles
3. The Anaphora of Our Lord Jesus Christ
4. The Anaphora of St. John The Evangelist
5. The Anaphora of St. Basil
6. The Anaphora of St. Athanasius
7. The Anaphora of The Three Hundred and Eighteen Fathers
8. The Anaphora of St. Gregory the Armenian
9. The Anaphora of St. Epiphanius
10. The Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom

11. The Anaphora of St. Cyril
12. The Anaphora of St. James of Serug
13. The Anaphora of St. Dioscorus
14. The Anaphora of St. Gregory of Alexandria.

The exact origin of most of the Ethiopic Anaphoras has not been discovered. They first appear in manuscripts of the 15th century, but were doubtless composed very much earlier. Scholars at one time assumed that all or most of these Anaphoras were translations of foreign liturgies, but recent studies, such as that of Ernst Hammerschmidt, have demonstrated that many of the Anaphora are genuine creations of Ethiopic literature evincing theological thought and liturgical poetry of a high order.

### **Painting and Manuscript Art**

The hall-mark of a sophisticated artistic expression of any country can be tested by its capacity to assimilate many elements from foreign sources and indigenise these foreign influences. Ethiopian representational art is no exception to this rule. In fact Ethiopian art has syncretized both Oriental and Byzantine artistic traits. Although architecture and metal work belong to representational art, we are here concerned with painting, which is by far the most representative and ubiquitous branch of Ethiopian Art.

With the exception of a few ancient rock carvings or drawings which depict both human and animal scenes, Ethiopian painting is virtually wholly ecclesiastic. It is Christianity, the religion of the state, that has determined the scope and purpose of painting in Ethiopia.

Generally speaking, clarity, vividness and the capacity to convey an idea dominate Ethiopian painting more than the desire to give pleasure. Ethiopian artists may even go so far as to distort proportion in order to convey an idea vividly. Such paintings are found in the form of icons, as murals in churches and in manuscripts.

The imaginative church artists have beautified and ornamented these paintings with elaborate colour, illumination and elegant design. Priests and monks insert pictures in their books in order to communicate the message to the faithful more vividly and colourfully.

In fact Ethiopian artistic accomplishment is considered by many scholars to have reached its apogée in the illuminated manuscripts produced in the great monasteries between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. The finest manuscripts are written on goatskin, whereas for ordinary purposes sheepskin is used. The text is usually written in a copiously decorated heavy black script with occasional insertions in red. The pages vary in size, but may be very large; the text is written in one, two or three columns according to the size of the manuscript. Lavish illustrations abound, sometimes occupying whole pages and sometimes incorporated into the text. The leaves are put together in quires, usually of ten pages. They are then bound between wooden boards often covered with tooled leather and the completed book may then be provided with a leather case with straps that make it convenient for carrying.

Ethiopian paintings are characterized by Biblical themes and figures. Angels, evangelists, saints, martyrs and other biblical personalities are the subjects of paintings in Ethiopia. Of all these biblical personalities the Virgin Mary occupies a very prominent place in Ethiopian painting. The extreme veneration attributed to St. Mary finds its expression in many ways. For instance, some pictures depict St. Mary as a delicate and modest young girl, while others show her as a strong, mature woman and protector of the Ethiopian people.

The paintings and pictures found in various manuscripts and on the walls in churches, afford the viewer a moral lesson and religious instruction. As they communicate their message clearly they are a way of acquainting the faithful with the teachings of Christ, the history and teachings of the Church, the lives and acts of the Apostles. All this of course is in addition to the purely aesthetic role they fulfill as objects of beauty and decoration.



## THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH SCHOOL SYSTEM\*

The educational system in Ethiopia has been profoundly moulded by the past. Traditional education derives its distinctive character from the unique Christian heritage of the country. Ethiopia is, after all, the only African country to have preserved Christianity as its religion for over a millenium and a half. Moreover, having its own written language and literature it developed from very early days a tradition of ecclesiastical scholarship. The long monastic tradition dates back to the fifth century and the significant role of monasticism in the diffusion of Christian learning during the mediaeval period has been described in an earlier chapter. In the Christian highlands of Ethiopia, the Church constituted the main guardian of traditional culture and provided the only schools in the land for many centuries. Not only did it preserve its ancient tradition with tenacity and convey it to future generations but it also secured remarkable continuity that has lasted to the present day. For the authority of tradition in present day Ethiopia remains compelling and forceful.

The church school system has been the instrument that has preserved the traditional learning of Ethiopia and conveyed it faithfully to succeeding generations. The priests and Church scholars who are the bearers and propagators of traditional learning have themselves been formed in the church school system that we propose to examine in some detail. For, in spite of the inevitable changes taking place in Ethiopia with the steady expansion of modern secular education in the present century, church schools still play an active part on the Ethiopian educational scene.

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\* *Acknowledgement*: This paper with the exception of the introductory and concluding paragraphs, was first prepared for the Ford Foundation Survey of Language Use and Language Training Monograph: *Language in Ethiopia*, to be published by the Oxford University Press.

The church school system, which is one of the oldest in Christendom, originated in the Aksumite Kingdom with the introduction of Christianity about the 4th century. In the course of the centuries the school system has grown and changed in many ways. With the expansion of the Kingdom and Christianity to the south and south-west, churches and monasteries were founded, which became for centuries important centres of learning.

In their present form the church schools evolved during the "golden age" of the Church from the 13th to the 16th centuries when the literature of the Church had reached its peak. After the great wars, particularly after the 17th century, cultural activities declined. From that time to the present the church schools have undergone little change. The schools have in this period confined their educational activities to glorifying the products of past centuries and conveying these to the coming generation. We shall not discuss here the historical development, but rather the educational activities of the schools as we know them today in the country.

The church school system has the following divisions:

- 1) *Nebab Bet*, 2) *Qidasse Bet*, and 3) higher schools, namely
- a) *Zema Bet*, b) *Qene Bet*, and c) *Metshaf Bet*, which again have different subdivisions.

### 1) The *Nebab Bet*

The *Nebab Bet*, the Reading School or the "House of Reading" is the first stage of the traditional schools, where primary instruction is given. We find the *Nebab Bet* in practically all churches and monasteries, in a number of villages and in the compounds of well-to-do landlords. It is a one-teacher school, with instruction given by a priest or a layman with church education. It is difficult to estimate the number of *Nebab Bet* in the country or to evaluate the school population involved. According to the Church Office there are about 15,000 churches in Ethiopia. If each church has one *Nebab Bet*, which is probably the case, then there are at least 15,000 one-teacher schools.

Each *Nebab Bet* may have an average of 20 pupils. We may then

be justified, with some reservation, in saying that at present the total *Nebab Bet* enrolment might well be 300,000. This does not include the pupils receiving instruction in the village schools and in private compounds.

Normally children start school between the ages of 5 and 7, when they are traditionally considered ready to learn. Theoretically, both boys and girls and members of all ethnic groups and classes are eligible to enroll in church schools. However, in rural districts, parents generally discourage the education of girls, since their function is to be housewives, and for this role no formal education is felt to be necessary. Non-Christian families are reluctant to send their children to a *Nebab Bet* because it is closely integrated with the Church. Therefore, the *Nebab Bet* and the church schools as a whole cannot be considered to serve the entire population, but only members of the Orthodox Christian Church.

The prime function of the *Nebab Bet* is to teach children to read religious books, practically all of which are in Ge'ez. Instruction in the *Nebab Bet* consists almost exclusively of reading. Children master the 231 letters of the Ge'ez syllabary, and are drilled in the art of good reading. Traditionally writing is not taught, since this was not needed in everyday life, unlike reading which is necessary for daily prayers and participating in the church service. In urban centres and roadside towns the *Nebab Bet* has a new function today. It serves as a preparation for modern schools. The modern schools often accept more readily in their primary grades those children who can already read and write. This limitation of the enrolment is mainly due to the large number of applicants and to an insufficient number of schools, so parents, especially those who do not need the labour of their children, are obliged to send their children to the *Nebab Bet* as a first step to enrolment in a modern government school.

The instruction in the *Nebab Bet* is given in three different stages:

- a) *Fidel* (Alphabet) Instruction
- b) Drill in the reading of various religious texts
- c) Reading of the Psalms of David

### a) Fidel Instruction

The first subject of study for the child is the set of Ge'ez letters, known as the *Fidel*. In earlier times the letters were written on a roll of parchment, which the pupil carried with him. When he was studying a particular part of the *Fidel* the student unrolled the parchment and fixed the two ends of the roll on a wooden stick with a piece of cloth or string. Today children use a printed table of letters, which is glued on to a single sheet of cardboard. This is available for about ten cents in every market place in the country, so that the traditional parchment is disappearing.

What is the process of learning the letters? The child, who is led by his teacher or a monitor, touches with a straw each letter from left to right of the table and names the letter in a loud voice. He repeats this for months. Usually the child learns the whole set of letters in sequence by heart, so that in reality he may not be able to distinguish one letter from the other. As a next step to help him distinguish individual letters, he is led to pronounce each letter reading from right to left and then from top to bottom. This process is known as *Qutir*, i.e. "learning by counting each letter". The large number of characters (33 in 7 orders) with the differences and irregularities of the related sets are not easily grasped by the beginner. To help the child distinguish the different characteristics of the alphabet another table has been prepared. On such tables the number of the letters and the forms in the seven orders remain the same, but the place of the characters is changed or mixed up, so that the child cannot depend only on his memory and the sequence in which he has memorized the characters. Today the standardized table "A bu gi da" is much used, however, so that the pupil may learn even this by heart and only comes to distinguish the individual characters well after much practice.

When the pupil knows the letters to some extent, he starts to practice reading a text. Generally, the *First Epistle of St. John* is used for the purpose.

The child uses four methods to practice reading this text known as *Fidele Hawaria* or the *First Epistle of St. John*. First he pronounces every letter of the word pointing at each letter with a straw (*Qutir*-method). He repeats this pronunciation exercise on the same text

several times. When he is able to distinguish the letters he passes to the next drill known as *Ge'ez*, i.e. the beginning of reading. Here the student attempts to put the letters together in a chanting form and read them as a word. The same process is repeated for several days or even months. When the teacher feels that his pupil has mastered this stage, he leads him to "*Wurdnebab*". Now the child practises reading words, again chanting, but different from the *Ge'ez*. The pupil learns to take much care over words that must be read together, the accents, the pauses and the soft or hard pronunciations of the syllables. This step is important, so the pupil spends more time on it. The final stage known as "*Qum Nebab*" is simple, if the above stages are well-mastered. Here the child practises reading at a very lively pace, but without mistakes. The four steps are repeatedly drilled on the same text, *Fidele Hawaria*. The exercise of reading can be quite difficult for the beginner, particularly because the text is in *Ge'ez*, a language no longer spoken and therefore far from the experience of the child. With this stage the pupil is introduced to the art of reading *Ge'ez*, and his *Fidel* lessons are therefore completed. He can then practise reading different religious texts.

### b) Reading lessons from religious books

The number and the kind of books the student has to read at this stage is not standardized. All depends on the availability of books. Traditionally, teachers in different areas select any text for reading. The following texts are known to have been used in different areas: *Gabata Hawaria*, i.e. selected epistles of St. Paul, St. James, and St. Peter; the *Gospels*, usually the Gospel of St. John is used as a text for exercise; *Arganon*: praises of St. Mary; *Tamara Mariam*: the miracles and wonders of St. Mary; *Paulos*: the epistles of St. Paul; *Tamara Iyesus*: the miracles of Jesus; the *Acts of the Apostles*, etc. Pupils need not understand the texts of these books, but they have to be able to read them well, since these are the books read in the church service, where young boys serve as readers, deacons, and later on as priests. The methods of practising the reading are those described under the *Fidele Hawaria*, namely, *Qutir*, *Ge'ez*, *Wurdnebab*, and *Nebab*.

When the pupil is able to read a text, he starts a new lesson known

in Amharic as *Yemata Timhirt*, i.e. an evening lesson, or *Yequal Timhirt*, i.e. memorization. Every evening he has to memorize the daily prayers. In the evening the pupils come to the house of the teacher, which is also at the same time the school itself. All stand around the teacher while the lesson is given. The teacher or an advanced student recites to the pupil sentence-by-sentence or verse-by-verse the standard prayer the child has to memorize. The pupil then repeats the sentence till he knows it well. This exercise is repeated for months or even a couple of years, until the boy knows the main prayers by heart. In some cases the Ethiopic catechetical book, the *Aemade Mestir* (*Columnae Misterii*), particularly *Mestire Sellassie* (on the Trinity), is taught in Amharic. All other texts are in Ge'ez. Since the pupils do not understand the texts, the memorization drills are very exacting in energy and time.

When the teacher is convinced from his daily observations that his pupil has mastered the reading exercises, he lets him start to learn the reading of the Psalms.

### c) Reading the Psalms

The pupil now learns to read the Psalms, the most important devotional book of Ethiopian Christians. The method he uses is the chanting form and the *Wurdnebab* reading process. After repeating the entire Book of Psalms several times using *Wurdnebab*, he continues reading for months, even over a year, using the *Qum-Nebab* reading method. If the student has already read different books as described above, the study of the Psalms is not too difficult. In some cases students are made to memorize the texts of the Psalms. This is particularly important for those students who plan to continue on to higher learning, since passages from the Psalms are used frequently in the hymns and poems of the church. Gradually the pupil masters the art of good reading. The teacher normally does not set a formal examination to judge the work of the pupil. However, he follows the progress of his student daily, so no special tests are needed.

When he is convinced that the pupil has reached the level of knowledge traditionally required at this stage of learning, he indicates that

# TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS UNDER DIRECT SUPERVISION OF THE CHURCH

| No. | Place                 | No. of<br>Schools | No. of<br>Teachers |          | No. of<br>Students |              | Total<br>No. of<br>Students |
|-----|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
|     |                       |                   | Male               | Female   | Male               | Female       |                             |
| 1.  | Addis Ababa           | 62                | 97                 | 1        | 3,158              | 1,355        | 4,513                       |
| 2.  | Shoa                  | 255               | 293                |          | 10,658             | 1,471        | 12,129                      |
| 3.  | Illubabor             | 11                | 14                 |          | 254                | 109          | 363                         |
| 4.  | Gomu Goffa            | 7                 | 10                 |          | 291                | 121          | 412                         |
| 5.  | Arussie               | 20                | 31                 | 1        | 1,385              | 476          | 1,861                       |
| 6.  | Keffa                 | 31                | 49                 |          | 1,437              | 743          | 2,180                       |
| 7.  | Bale                  | 18                | 21                 |          | 663                | 283          | 946                         |
| 8.  | Tigre                 | 253               | 301                | 2        | 11,957             | 1,615        | 13,572                      |
| 9.  | Wollo                 | 252               | 264                |          | 4,148              | 629          | 4,777                       |
| 10. | Harar                 | 34                | 51                 |          | 1,318              | 304          | 1,622                       |
| 11. | Sidamo                | 31                | 43                 |          | 1,475              | 515          | 1,990                       |
| 12. | Wollega               | 19                | 31                 | 3        | 2,076              | 684          | 2,760                       |
| 13. | Semen and<br>Begemder | 148               | 148                |          | 4,246              | 37           | 4,283                       |
| 14. | Gojjam                | 322               | 322                |          | 6,199              | 28           | 6,227                       |
| 15. | Eritrea               |                   |                    |          |                    |              |                             |
|     | <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>1,463</b>      | <b>1,675</b>       | <b>7</b> | <b>49,265</b>      | <b>8,370</b> | <b>57,635</b>               |

**Source:** Ethiopian Orthodox Church Head Office, Dept. of Education. Year: 1960 E.C.

**Footnote:** The figures for Gojjam and Begemder have been obtained from the school census of 1967.

the time has come when he may leave the *Nebab Bet*. This is considered one of the most important events in the life of the pupil. It is also an occasion of joy for the family, and the parents usually organize a feast to mark the event.

A reader of the Psalms enjoys certain privileges as one of the élite in his village. He may be called upon to read and write letters. At certain ceremonies he may recite prayers, if no priest is available. The girls from traditional families who have attended the school usually marry before or shortly after they complete the lessons in the House of Reading.

## 2. *Qidasse Bet* — The training of the altar priest

Some of the pupils who complete the *Nebab Bet* join a *Qidasse* School, one of the schools of the liturgy. A teacher specialized in *Qidasse* or the Mass is to be found in practically all the main churches. A teacher specialized in this branch of the liturgy teaches the *Gebra Diqua* and *Gebra Qissina*, i.e. the functions of a deacon and of a priest in the liturgy. Children of the clergy, who use church lands, usually enter such schools in order to become deacons or priests in a church (and thus keep their church land in the hands of the family). The office of a priest is particularly attractive to tenants or landless peasants, because a priest in his area enjoys privileges, and his office entitles him to possession of the land known as *Semon* land. The function of an altar priest is limited to carrying out the rituals of the Mass and the Sacraments. For this purpose scanty training suffices. A *Qidasse* teacher normally teaches only the hymns which a deacon or a priest has to use in the liturgy of the Church. The rest, including teaching the traditions and service of the Church, is learned through daily experience in the parish itself. Usually a candidate for this training is attached to a priest or monk to whom he gives certain services, accompanying him on visits to families, festivals, and ceremonies in and outside the parish. Through observation or day-to-day practice and instruction by his priest-master, the boy learns the Church activities and functions of a deacon and of a priest. The activities of the priest, therefore, are limited to the rituals, which do not usually demand the understanding of the Scriptures. Thus relatively little education is expected from a young man to be ordained an altar priest.



### 3) The Higher Schools of the Church.

We have seen that the *Qidasse Bet* trains mainly the altar priests, who are also known as the *Semoneгна* (those who serve weekly). These are the only members of the clergy who are allowed to celebrate the Mass and administer the Sacraments. However, before and after the Mass there are readings of the Scriptures, ritual dances, and long hymns and poems. To be able to carry out this further service one has to attend a higher school of the Church, which should be considered an extension of the *Nebab* and *Qidasse Bet*.



The leading teachers and scholars of the Church, who are known as *Debtera*, are trained in the higher schools. A *Debtera* is characterized by his extensive knowledge of the traditional patristic and biblical scriptures, church music, religious poetry, and canon law. So *Debtera* is a general term given to all those who have completed one of the higher schools of the Church. Theoretically, priests and monks can also be characterized as *Debtera*, if they have completed studies in one of the higher schools. In practice however, few fall into this category, and these few are not usually known as *Debtera*. The majority of the *Debtera* are laymen, and as such they are not allowed to serve in the Mass and the administration of Sacraments. Their functions extend rather to teaching, writing, ritual music, poetry, dances, painting, and administration of the church.

A student of the *Nebab Bet* or *Qidasse Bet*, who would like to join the higher schools, usually leaves his parents and joins the wandering students who travel from parish to parish and from monastery to monastery. Traditionally a boy can receive only the *Nebab Bet* instruction while he is at home. The main reason for wandering in search of schools and teachers is that in rural areas any higher education is not possible for a youth who remains with his parents, except in a few cases of *Debtera* families. The heavy demands of cultivation and cattle-tending force the parents to demand the services of their children. Besides this, the student is attracted by the adventurous and romantic life of a begging and wandering student, about whom much is spoken and fabulous stories are told. Wandering students usually come from farming and clerical families — very few are from the higher classes.

With the spread of modern education and a modern school system this institution is declining. Fewer young people are motivated to study in the higher church schools. One of the main reasons for this change is that the graduates of the church schools have lost their traditional élite status in the social order, which today, particularly in the modern sector, is being occupied by those who have a modern Western type of education.

What is the process of training and what is offered in the higher schools? The main courses of study are in church music, church poetry, and religious literature, each divided according to content of instruction:

- a) *Zema Bet*, the House of Music, or Music School
- b) *Qene Bet*, the House of Poetry, or Poetry School
- c) *Metshaf Bet*, the House of the Books, or School of Commentaries, the highest school of all.

#### a) *Zema Bet*, the Music School

The *Zema Bet* again is divided into four special disciplines, each represented and taught by a specialist. The first *Zema* branch is *Degwa Bet*. The *Degwa*, a hymnary, contains all the songs and hymns of the church for the whole year, except the Mass and the Horologium which are contained in the *Qidasse* and *Se'atat* books. *Degwa* study is the longest and the most important branch of the *Zema Bet*. At the beginning students may study under any teacher, but for the final portion of their course they try to look for a famous *Degwa* school or teacher and attach themselves to him for some time before completing their studies.

The second branch of *Zema* studies is *Zemaré* and *Mewasi'it*. *Zemaré* hymns are sung by a choir of *Debtera* at the end of the Mass, whereas *Mewasi'it* hymns are sung at funerals and memorial services.

The third branch is known as *Qidasse* and *Se'atat*. Here the Mass and the Horologium are taught. In this branch those who would like to specialize as teachers in the *Qidasse Bet* are trained. In the *Qidasse* and *Se'atat* a thorough knowledge is acquired, whereas training at the *Qidasse Bet* for deacons and priests stresses practical applications, with less emphasis on the details and fine points of the Mass. Those who wish to be teachers or specialists in *Qidasse* and *Se'atat* must attend a famous and recognized school, such as Debre Abay in Tigre or Selelkula in Wadla, Wello.

The last branch of *Zema* is known as *Aquaquam*. Any *Zema* student who has studied *Qum Zema* (pure music), *Degwa*, or *Zemaré-Mewasi'it* must supplement his knowledge by attending the *Aquaquam*. So far he has learned to sing alone; now in *Aquaquam* he must learn to sing in a choir. Here the hymns are learned in connection with the rhythmical movements (*Warab*, *Zemame*, *Mahlet*) and with the use of a choir instrument like the Sistrum or the prayer-stick and with the movement and clapping of the hands.

In all these schools the student must learn the material by heart. To demonstrate this we should describe the average study day at the *Zema Bet*: The teacher of *Zema* sits in the middle of his pupils, who are practising their daily assignment of the hymns individually or in groups. Each group sings from a single text, or one of the group sings and the rest observe him. The more advanced students serve as monitors to instruct the beginners. When one of the students has mastered the hymn, he goes and sings before the teacher. The teacher either approves and gives the student a new assignment or orders further practice on the same text. The lessons advance in this manner day after day until the student finishes the fixed text of the hymn and knows it by heart.

This training challenges the memory of the child rather than leading him to think. In spite of the monotony of the learning and teaching methods and the exacting length of time, the students show surprisingly high morale. There are of course reasons for their diligence. The wandering student expects a high position in the Church hierarchy. Furthermore, since the instruction is considered sacred, just as prayer is, the student takes his assignment seriously. The resulting high morale in the school community helps the individual student to adapt himself to the hard work. The usually strict demands of the teachers are accepted without hesitation, because the wandering student has come to the school of his own free will and has willingly submitted himself to the authority of the teacher. If he is not satisfied, he can leave the school and look for another one.

#### b) *Qene Bet*

There are *Qene* forms or models that the student has to master in order to be able to compose the *Qene* poems which are sung in different sections of the liturgy of the Church or used to celebrate Church and state ceremonials. About nine models are famous in the *Samenna Worq* (Wax and Gold) *Qene* System. There are also other *Qene* types which are however not as widespread as the *Samenna Worq*.

The student begins by learning first the simplest *Qene* form known as the *Gubae Qana* which is an epigram composed of two rhyming verses. He then learns *Ze'amlakiye* (3 verses), *Wazema* (5 verses), *Nibezhu* (3 long verses), *Sellassie* (6 verses), *Zeyi'eze* (5 or 6 verses), *Kibryi-*



*A typical scholar of the Church*

*eti* (4 verses), *Itane Mogar* (7 or 11 verses), and *Mewadis* (8 verses). These are most widespread but there are other forms, e.g. in Gojjam, the Gonji and Washera schools of *Qene* differ from this.

The student learns *Qene* with more interest and motivation than the other disciplines, such as *Zema*. There are several reasons for this. The main one is that the student understands the Ge'ez language in the *Qene* school. The teaching method allows the boy free activities and movements as illustrated below. In the student an aesthetic interest is developed, or at least awakened. The following illustration may make this clear.

The *Qene* lessons usually start in the afternoon, or in some places early in the evening. The place of instruction is usually a communal hut near the teacher's dwelling known as the *Mahber Bet*, or simply in the open or under a tree. First there is a prayer to be recited. The teacher may then make some remarks on the students' work for the day. As the main task of the session some Ge'ez verbs are conjugated, and the proper usage of selected verbs and nouns is demonstrated by examples from different *Qene* verses composed by the teacher and advanced students on the spot. The story or legend of the saint whose feast is to be celebrated on the next day is then narrated; this comprises the theme of the *Qene* composition by the students, using the vocabulary and grammar already discussed at the session.

During the evening the student endeavours to find the proper music to fit the *Qene* model he is going to compose; since all *Qene* has to be sung, his *Qene* piece must be suited to a corresponding musical form. The next day the student looks for a secluded place and meditates on his composition. When he has composed his *Qene* verse after the model assigned to him by the teacher, he then approaches the teacher, who sits for the most part of the day at a place known to all. The teacher is usually engaged in some individual work such as reading, copying a manuscript, or even doing some handwork.

The student recites the product of his intellectual labour. The teacher either accepts the verses or offers critical comments and sends the student back for further meditation. Students come at intervals to the teacher to recite in this manner.

In the afternoon the session, or *Gubae* takes place again. The work

of the day is first reviewed, in which a lively discussion is usually generated.

This timetable shows that the student does not assimilate his lesson passively as happens in other branches of traditional learning. He has the opportunity to discuss the theme given, which challenges his intellect. He should not, however, contradict or be critical of religious and other accepted values. The student strains his power of expression to construct the *Qene* verses in a vivid, enigmatic manner or to express his experience in social life in connection with biblical stories, visions, and legendary events.

One could say that in the *Qene* School the content of learning covers practically all aspects of the values of the traditional social system in which the student lives. The *Qene* School is perhaps the only school where the student can receive both intellectual and traditional training. It is generally recognized that the most able clergy of the Church are those trained in the *Qene* School. The main interest and purpose of the school is, however, not to develop poetic and other aesthetic interests in the child or youth, but to enable him to carry out the Church rituals. A graduate of a *Qene* School looks for a position in a church and serves in the choir where he composes *Qene* and sings, or he may take a post as a minor teacher or administrator in the church. Those who want to study further may join the next school, the *Metshaf Bet*. To specialize in *Qene* so as to be a teacher in a higher school, the student must attend several schools and study more branches of *Qene*, which means studying and wandering for some years more.

### c) *Metshaf Bet*

This is the general term for the School of Commentaries composed of four branches: The first type is known as *Beluy*. The 46 Books of the Old Testament are studied and commented upon. The second branch is the *Haddis*, a specialized school on the commentaries of the 35 Books of the Ethiopian New Testament. The third branch is *Liqawent*, which presents studies and comments on the various writings of the Church Fathers, e.g. Saint John Chrysostom, Qerlos and others. The canon law (*Fetha Negest*) as well as the calendar calculation (*Bahre Hasab*) are also studied here. The last branch of the *Metshaf Bet* is



the *Menekosat*, the School of Commentaries on monastic literature.

In these specialized branches the student learns the traditions of the Church, theology, Church history and laws, through the interpretation of the various individual writings. The commentaries of these teachings do not proceed under systematic theological or historical categories, but when each sentence or phrase of a text is interpreted, depending on the content, theological, moral and historical questions are raised, discussed, and developed. The student has to learn each sentence of the commentary by heart. The following is a typical example of a *Metshaf Bet* lesson:

Students come to the teacher in a group of three or four, all studying the same text. One of the group reads a sentence or a phrase. The teacher first translates the sentence into Amharic and then comments on it. The students listen attentively and try to remember the comment word for word. When this group leaves the teacher, another group or individual comes to read to the teacher and hears his commentary. After leaving the teacher each group moves apart and tries to comment on the text just as the teacher did, as much as possible word for word. If one misses a word or an idea, another member of the group recalls it and supplements. After some time the group goes again to the teacher and reads the same text and again comments on it. This way the group can compare its progress to know how far it has grasped the interpretation of the previous time.

This memorization of the commentary of the books exacts many years of exercise and labour, which the adult student is ready to accept. A graduate of the *Metshaf Bet* enjoys high prestige as a scholar and can take a high post in the Church hierarchy, such as head of a monastery (*Gedam*) or a large church (*Debr*). This hope is perhaps one of the motives that encourages the student to spend more than half of his life at such a school. At this stage memorization is not felt as a burden by the student, because ever since his early days in the *Nebab Bet* he has developed his powers of memorization.

One important reason memorization is so stressed all through the Church schools is that writing materials were traditionally not well-developed. The few handwritten manuscripts on parchment were, and still are, very expensive. Aside from the authoritarian tradition

there is another consideration: the student is not allowed to have a critical opinion about any text to be commented upon, since it is believed that God revealed the content to the Fathers through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, these patristic writings are not to be considered critically, but simply learnt by heart. The habit of memorization and the uncritical acceptance of the commentary conditions the mode of thinking of the student.

In this way the historical interpretations are mixed with legendary tales and special natural events, all considered to be miracles, and even concrete phenomena are given symbolical meanings. The expressions are vividly illustrated with parables, analogies, proverbs, and popular wisdom. Parallels are quoted from the history of the country while interpreting the passages on the Holy Land. Generally, the approach to reality is well-mixed with mythical attitudes.

These schools of commentaries are not to be found everywhere, but in large churches, *Debr*, and in monasteries, *Geddām*, where extensive libraries and famous teachers are to be found. It may be that church schools as a whole will take on a new impetus and play an important rôle in raising the general level of education of the clergy in the future.

The church schools that have been described above provide the continuation of traditional education in Ethiopia. Modern education, of recent origin, is provided mainly in schools operated by the Government. However, in the urban centres and roadside towns the elementary church school, the *Nebab Bet* is flourishing as an institution to prepare pupils for Government schools, teaching young children literacy in Amharic. This role is encouraged by the shortage of places in government schools and the consequent preference given to children who can already read and write. Such schools may perhaps play a wider rôle within the context of the national campaign for literacy and provide more instruction for adults as well as young pupils.

It should be noted that the Church is fully aware of the necessity to train its own future leaders in such a way that they will fulfill their role in modern society. Modern theological colleges exist which combine traditional studies with the broader curriculum demanded in the twentieth century. A number of theological students have also progressed

to further advanced studies abroad. In other words, the Church is successfully bridging the transition from strictly traditional scholarship to a new, dynamic era where traditional learning and modern education will blend together to ensure the continuity of Ethiopia's Christian heritage in the setting of the modern world.

